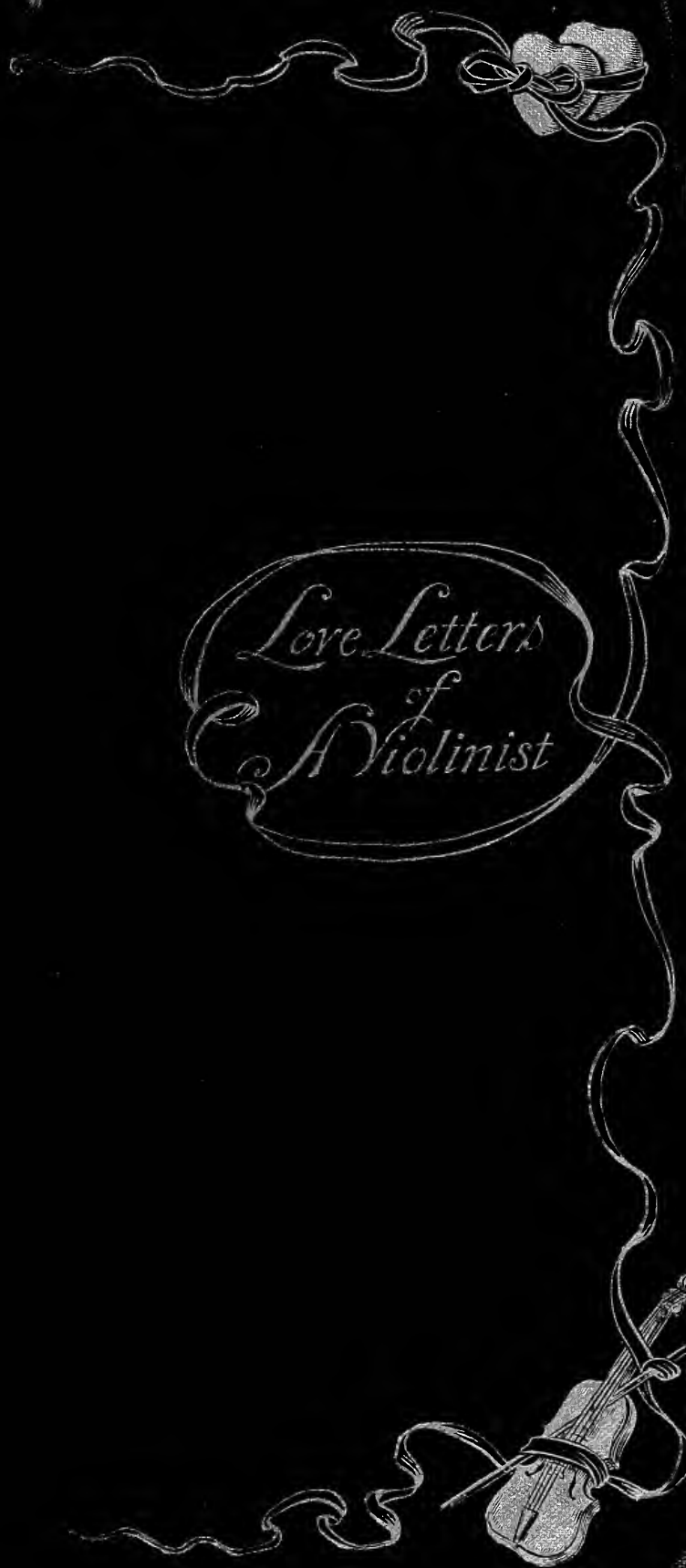


*Love Letters
of
A Violinist*



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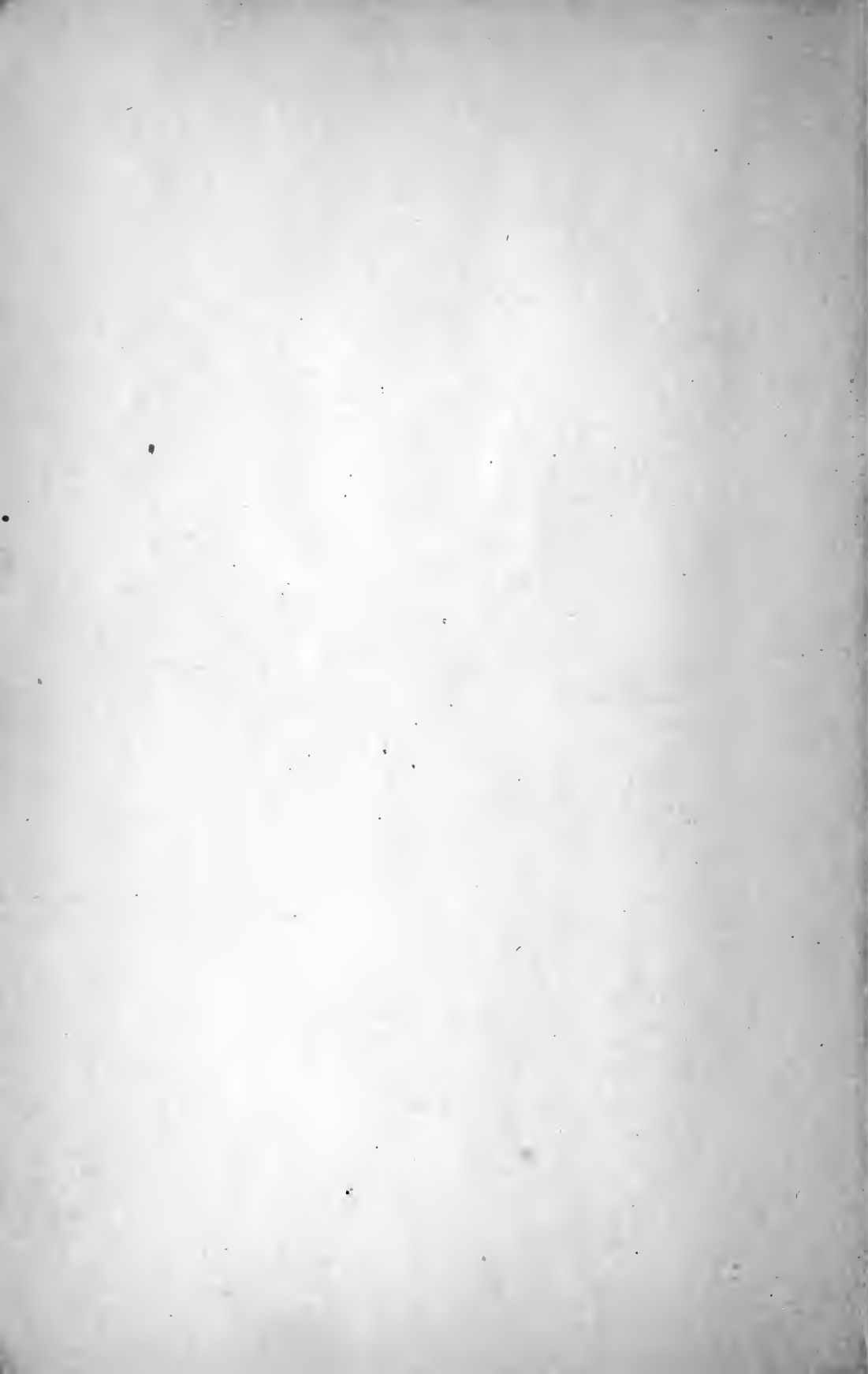
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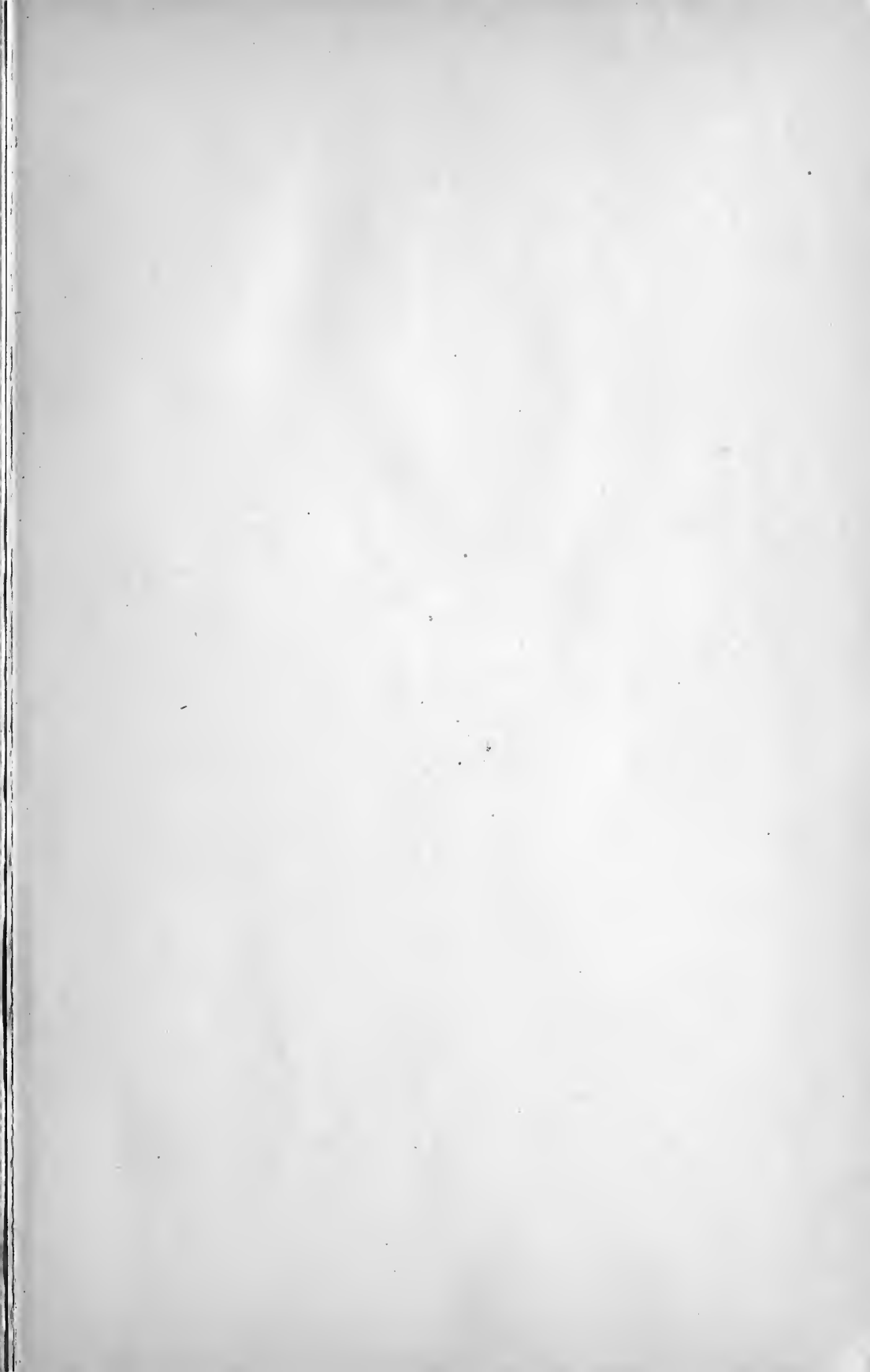
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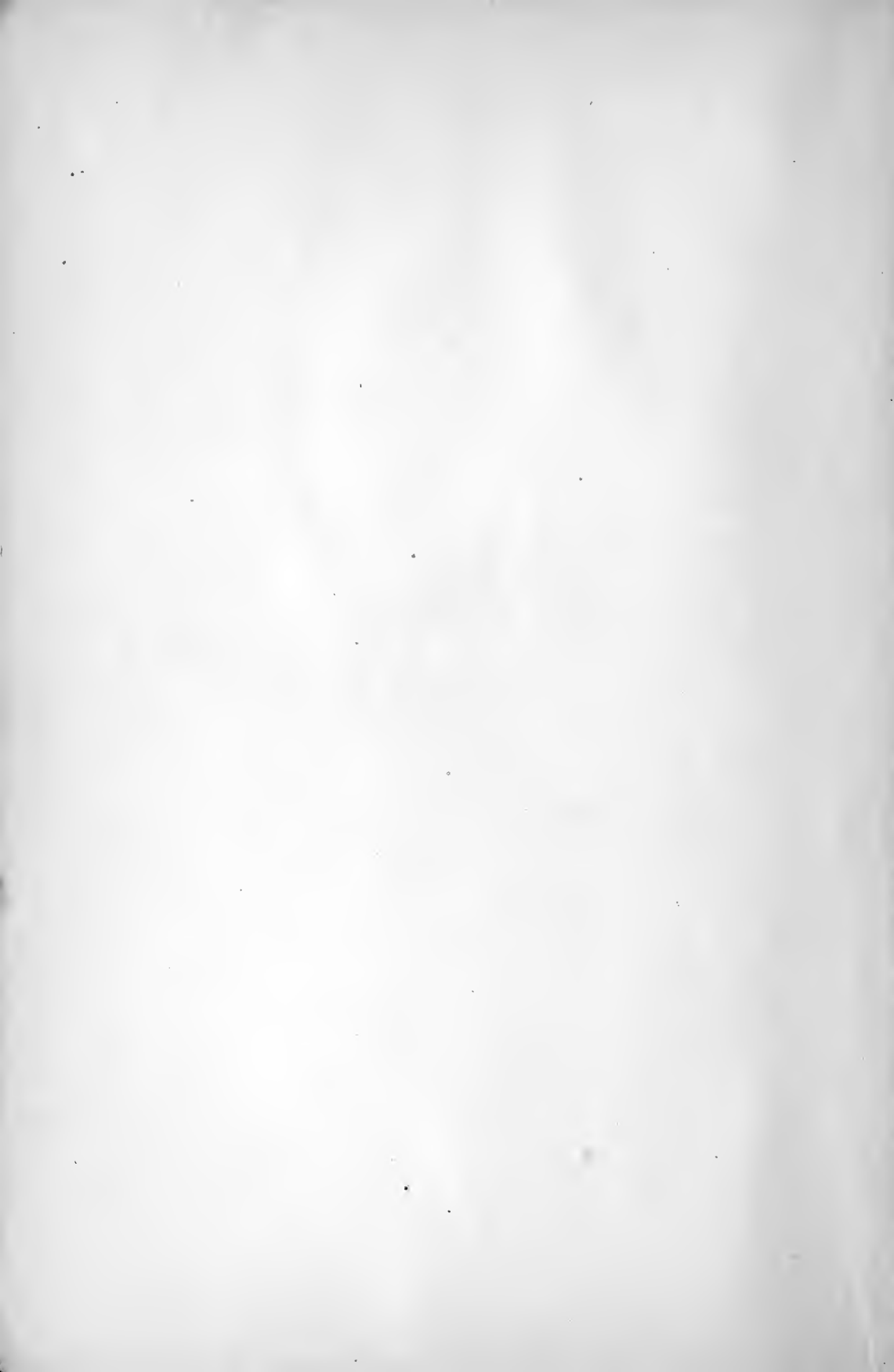
1892

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.









LOVE LETTERS
OF A VIOLINIST



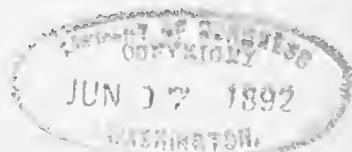
LOVE LETTERS OF A VIOLINIST

AND OTHER POEMS

BY
✓
ERIC MACKAY

SPECIAL COPYRIGHT AMERICAN EDITION

NEWLY REVISED BY THE AUTHOR



NEW YORK

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO

AMERICAN EDITION.

IN bringing out in America a special edition of my "Love Letters of a Violinist and Other Poems," I have to certify that this is the only edition authorized for the United States, all other copies, whether printed in America or introduced on behalf of an English firm, being *incomplete*. The version published by Walter Scott in his series of "Canterbury Poets" does not include "Gladys the Singer" or "A Choral Ode to Liberty," and the same may be said of "My Lady in Wrath" and the lyrics from "Nero and Actèa," together with one of the sonnets, the one entitled, "A Veteran Poet." I am not sure that this is the place to launch out into what may be termed personalities, but something prompts me to speak of matters "not in the bond," and to say how grateful I am for sympathy shown me in the

"States" by men I have never seen—friends like the late John Eliot Bowen, the Rev. T. T. Munger, the late Paul Hamilton Hayne, and many others, including Edmund Clarence Stedman, poet and critic, whose great work, "The Victorian Poets," is now acknowledged everywhere as a masterpiece. That he has been generous in his praise of me affects me much. "You are an Englishman," he seems to say, leaning forward as it were on the threshold of his land. "Come in and live with us, in your books!" And here I am, my inner self, ready, in this new garb, to face what friends I have. I never forget—how can I?—that my first readers were Americans, my first poem, so far as this collection is concerned, having been published in the *Independent* of New York, to which, and other journals, I herewith tender my most hearty thanks on this my birthday morning, when, as chance will have it, I am sending the proof-sheets of this book to America.

ERIC MACKAY.

LONDON, January 25, 1892.

TO MARIE.



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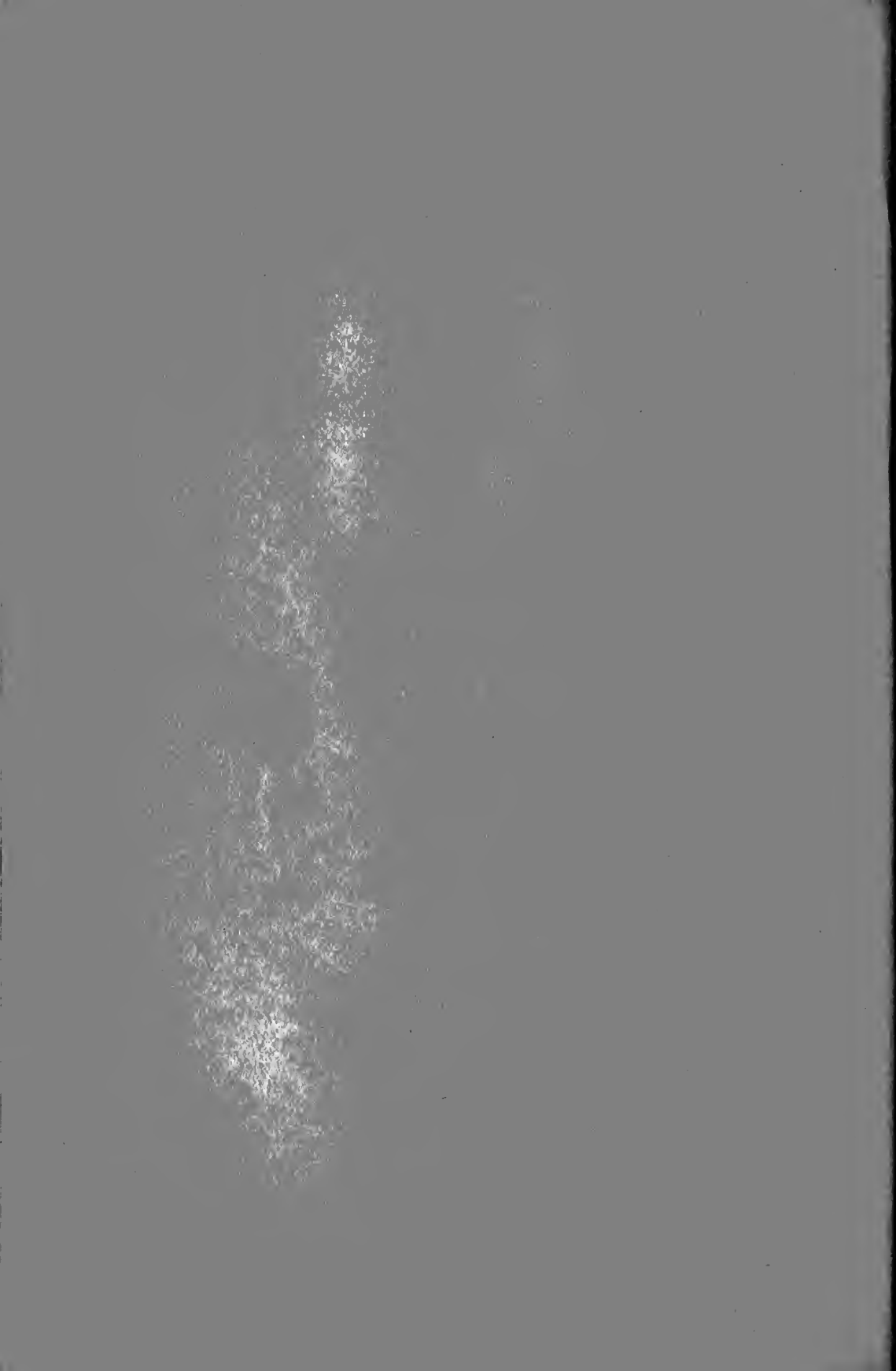
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LETTER I.

PRELUDE.



LETTER I.

PRELUDE.

I.

TEACH me to love thee as a man, in prayer,
May love the picture of a sainted nun,
And I will woo thee, when the day is done,
With tears and vows, and fealty past compare,
And seek the sunlight in thy golden hair,
And kiss thy hand to claim thy benison.

II.

I shall not need to gaze upon the skies,
Or mark the message of the morning breeze,
Or heed the notes of birds among the trees,
If, taught by thee to yearn for Paradise,
I may confront thee with adoring eyes
And do thee homage on my bended knees.

III.

For I would be thy pilgrim ; I would bow
Low as the grave, and lingering in the same,
Live like a spectre ; or be burnt in flame
To do thee good. A kingdom for a vow
I'd freely give to be elected now
The chief of all the servants of thy fame.

IV.

Yes, like a Roman of the days of old,
I would, for thee, constract a votive shrine,
And fan the fire, and consecrate the wine ;
And have a statue there, of purest gold,
And bow thereto, unlov'd and unconsolated,
But proud withal to know the statue thine.

V.

For it were sacrilege to stand erect,
And face to face, within thy chamber lone,
To urge again my right to what hath flown :
A bygone trust, a passion coldly check'd !
Were I a king of men, or laurel-deck'd,
I were not fit to claim thee as mine own.

VI.

What am I then? The sexton of a joy,
So lately slain—so lately on its bier
Laid out in state—I dare not, for the fear
Of this dead thing, regard it as a toy.
It was a splendid Hope without alloy,
And now, behold ! I greet it with a tear.

VII.

It is my pastime, and my penance, too,
My pride, my comfort, and my discontent,
To count my sorrows ere the day is spent,
And dream, at night, of love within the blue
Of thy sweet eyes, and tremble through and through,
And keep my house, as one that doth lament.

VIII.

Have I not sinn'd? I have ; and I am curst,
And Misery makes the moments, as they fly,
Harder than stone, and sorrier than a sigh.
Oh, I did wrong thee when I met thee first,
And in my soul a fantasy was nurs'd
That seem'd an outcome of the upper sky.

IX.

I thought a poor musician might aspire ;
I thought he might obtain from thee a look,
As Dian's self will smile upon a brook,
And make it glad, though deaf to its desire,
And tinge its ripples with a tender fire,
And make it thankful in its lonely nook.

X.

I thought to win thee ere the waning days
Had caught the snow, ere yet a word of mine
Had pall'd upon thee in the summer shine ;
And I was fain to meet thee in the ways
Of wild romance, and cling to thee, and gaze,
Between two kisses, on thy face divine.

XI.

Aye ! on thy face, and on the rippling hair
That makes a mantle round thee in the night,
A royal robe, a network of the light,
Which fairies brought for thee, to keep thee fair,
And hide the glories of a beauty rare
As those of sylphs,—whereof the poets write.

XII.

I thought, by token of thy matchless form,
To curb thy will, and make thee mine indeed,
From head to foot. There is no other creed
For men and maids, in safety or in storm,
Than this of love. Repentance may be warm,
But love is best, though broken like a reed.

XIII.

"She shall be mine till death!" I wildly said,
"Mine, and mine only." And I vow'd, apace,
That I would have thee in my dwelling-place;
Yea, like a despot, I would see thee led
Straight to the altar, with a tear unshed,
A wordless woe imprinted on thy face.

XIV.

I wanted thee. I yearned for thee afar.
"She shall be mine," I cried, "and mine alone.
A Gorgon grief may change me into stone
If I be baulk'd!" I hankered for a star,
And soar'd, in thought, to where the angels are,
To snatch my prize beyond the torrid zone.

XV.

I heeded not the teaching of the past.
I heeded not the wisdom of the years.
"She shall be mine," I urged, "till death appears,
For death, I know, will conquer me at last."
And then I found the sky was overcast;
And then I felt the bitterness of tears.

XVI.

“Behold !” I thought, “Behold, how fair to see
Is this white wonder !” And I wish’d thee well,
But, like a demon out of darkest hell,
I marr’d thy peace, and claim’d thee on the plea
Of pride and passion ; and there came to me
The far-off warning of a wedding-bell.

XVII.

A friend of thine was walking to her doom,
A wife-elect, who, ere the summer sun
Had plied its course, would weep for what was
done,—
A friend of thine and mine, who, in the gloom
Of her own soul, had built herself a tomb,
To tremble there, when tears had ceas’d to run.

XVIII.

On this I brooded ; but ah ! not for this
Did I abandon what I sought the while :
The dear damnation of thy tender smile,
And all the tortures that were like a bliss,
And all the raptures of a holier kiss
Than fair Miranda’s on the magic isle.

XIX.

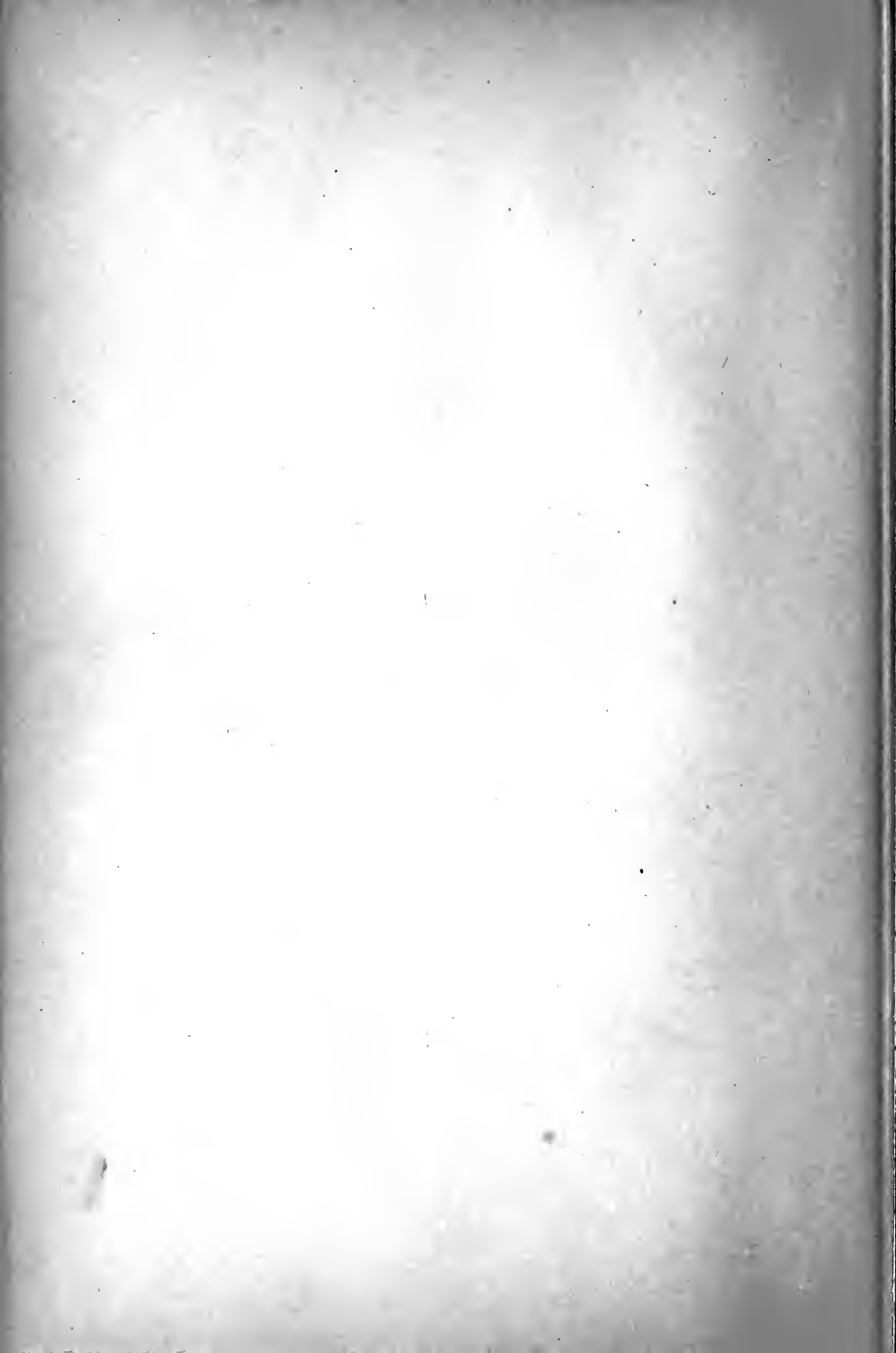
I urged my suit. “My bond !” I did exclaim,
“My pink and white, the hand I love to press,
The golden hair that crowns her loveliness ;
And all the beauties which I cannot name ;
All, all are mine, and I will have the same,
Though she should hate me for my love’s excess.”

XX.

I knew myself. I knew the withering fate.
That would consume me, if, amid my trust,
I sued for Hope as beggars for a crust.
“O God!” I cried, entranced though desolate,
“Hallow my love, or turn it into hate!”
And then I bow’d, in anguish, to the dust.

LETTER II.

SORROW.



LETTER II.

SORROW.

I.

YES, I was mad. I know it. I was mad.
For there is madness in the looks of love ;
And he who frights a tender, brooding dove
Is not more base than I, and not so sad ;
For I had kill'd the hope that made me glad,
And curs'd, in thought, the sunlight from above.

II.

He was a fool, indeed, who lately tried
To touch the moon, far-shining in the trees.
He clomb the branches with his hands and knees,
And craned his neck to kiss what he espied.
But down he fell, unseemly in his pride,
And told his follies to the fitful breeze.

III.

I was convicted of as strange a thing,
And wild as strange ; for, in a hope forlorn,
I fought with Fate. But now the Flag is torn
Which like a herald in the days of spring
I held aloft. The birds have ceased to sing
The dear old songs they sang from morn to morn.

IV.

All holy things avoid me. Breezes pass
And will not fan my cheek, as once they did.
The gloaming hies away like one forbid ;
And day returns, and shadows on the grass
Fall from the trees ; and night and morn amass
No joys for me this side the coffin-lid.

V.

Absolve me, Sweet ! Absolve me, or I die ;
And give me pardon, if no other boon.
Aye, give me pardon, and the sun and moon,
And all the stars that wander through the sky
Will be thy sponsors, and the gladden'd cry
Of one poor heart will thank thee for it soon.

VI.

And mine Amati—my belovèd one—
The tender sprite who soothes, as best he may,
My fever'd pulse, and makes a roundelay
Of all my fears—e'en he, when all is done,
Will be thy friend, and yield his place to none
To wish thee well, and greet thee day by day.

VII.

For he is human, though, to look at him,
To see his shape, to hear—as from the throat
Of some bright angel—his ecstatic note,
A sinful soul might dream of cherubim.
Aye ! and he watches when my senses swim,
And I can trace the thoughts that o'er him float.

VIII.

Often, indeed, I tell him more than man
E'er tells to woman in the honied hours
Of tranced night, in cities or in bowers ;
And more, perchance, than lovers in the span
Of absent letters may, with scheming, plan
For life's surrender in the fairy towers.

IX.

And he consoles me. There is none I find,
None in the world, so venturesome and wild,
And yet withal, so tender, true, and mild,
As he can be. And those who think him blind
Are much to blame. His ways are ever kind ;
And he can plead as softly as a child.

X.

And when he talks to me I feel the touch
Of some sweet hope, a feeling of content
Almost akin to what by joy is meant.
And then I brood on this ; for Love is such,
It makes us weep to want it overmuch,
If wayward Fate withhold his full consent.

XI.

Oh, come to me, thou friend of my desire,
My lov'd Amati ! At a word of thine
I can be brave, and dash away the brine
From off my cheek, and neutralise the fire
That makes me mad, and use thee as a lyre
To curb the anguish of this soul of mine.

XII.

Wood as thou art, my treasure, with the strings
Fair on thy form, as fits thy parentage,
I cannot deem that in a gilded cage
Thy spirit lives. The bird that in thee sings
Is not a mortal. No ! Enthralment flings
Its charm about thee like a poet's rage.

XIII.

Thou hast no sex ; but, in an elfish way,
Thou dost entwine in one, as in a troth,
The gleesome thoughts of man and maiden both.
Thy voice is fullest at the flush of day,
But after midnight there is much to say
In weird remembrance of an April oath.

XIV.

And when the moon is seated on the throne
Of some white cloud, with her attendants near—
The wondering stars that hold her name in fear—
Oh ! then I know that mine Amati's tone
Is all for me, and that he stands alone,
First of his tribe, belov'd without a peer.

XV.

Yea, this is so, my Lady ! A fair form
Made of the garner'd relics of a tree,
In which of old a dryad of the lea
Did live and die. He flourish'd in a storm,
And learnt to warble when the days were warm,
And learnt at night the secrets of the sea.

XVI.

And now he is all mine, for my caress
And my strong bow—an Ariel, as it seems—
A something sweeter than the sweetest dreams ;
A prison'd wizard that has come to bless
And will not curse, though tortured, more or less,
By some remembrance that athwart him streams.

XVII.

It is the thought of April. 'Tis the tie
That made us one ; for then the earth was fair
With all things on't, and summer in the air
Tingled for thee and me. A soft reply
Came to thy lips, and I was like to die
To hear thee make such coy confessions there.

XVIII.

It was the dawn of love (or so I thought)
The tender cooing of thy bosom-bird—
The beating heart that flutter'd at a word,
And seem'd for me alone to be so fraught
With wants unutter'd ! All my being caught
Glamour thereat, as at a boon conferr'd.

XIX.

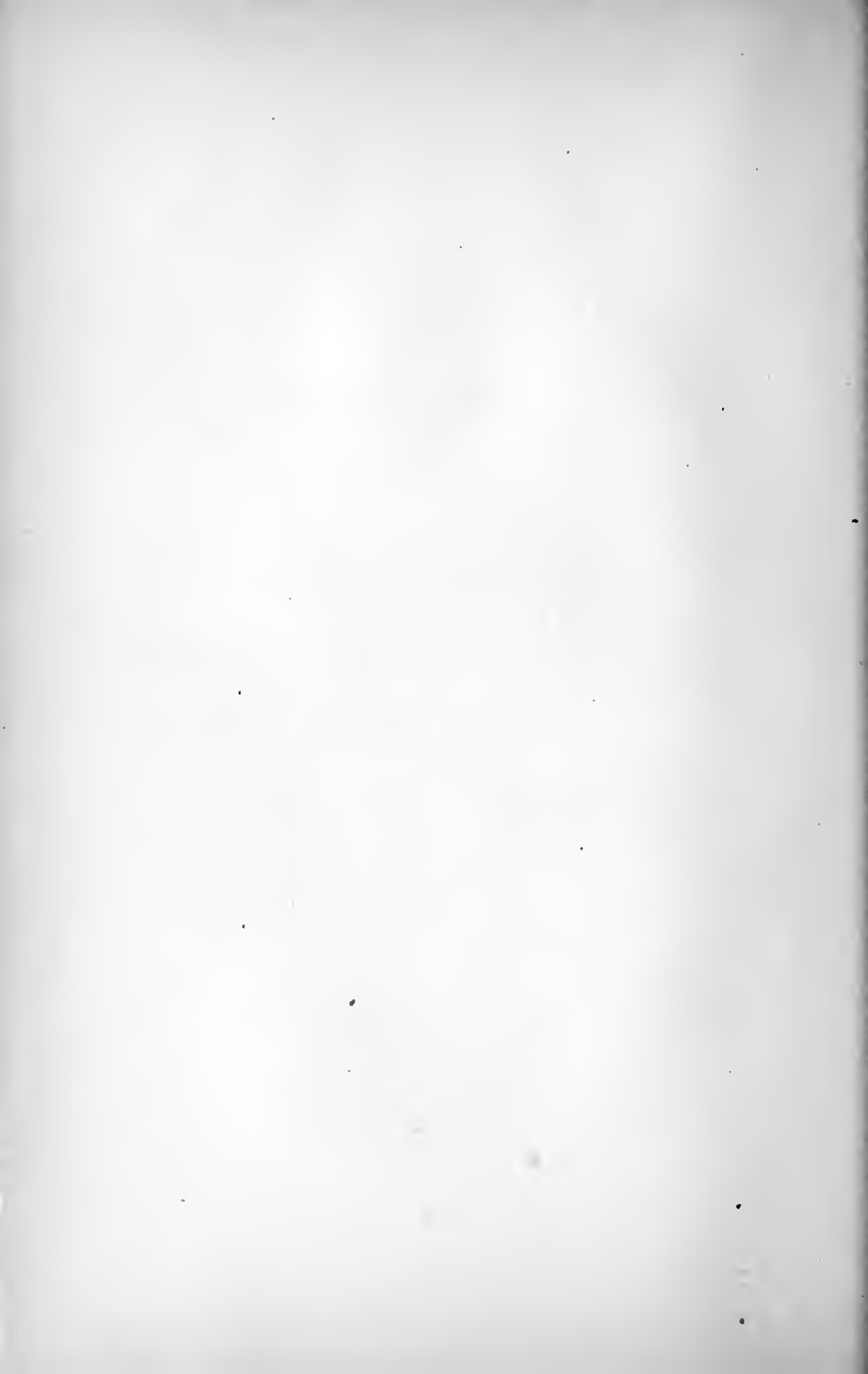
And I was lifted, in a minute's space,
As nigh to Heaven as Heaven is nigh to thee,
And in thy wistful glances I could see
Something that seem'd a joy, and in thy face
A splendour fit for angels in the place
Where God has named them all in their degree.

XX.

Ah, none so blest as I, and none so proud,
In that wild moment when a thrill was sent
Right through my soul, as if from thee it went
As flame from fire! But this was disallow'd;
And I shall sooner wear a winter shroud
Than thou revoke my doom of banishment.

LETTER III.

REGRETS.



LETTER III.

REGRETS.

I.

WHEN I did wake, to-day, a bird of Heaven,
A wanton, woeless thing, a wandering sprite,
Did seem to sing a song for my delight ;
And, far away, did make its holy steven
Sweeter to hear than lute-strings that are seven ;
And I did weep thereat in my despite.

II.

O glorious sun ! I thought, O gracious king
Of all this splendour that we call the earth !
For thee the lark distils his morning mirth,
But who will hear the matins that I sing ?
Who will be glad to greet me in the spring,
Or heed the voice of one so little worth ?

III

Who will accept the thanks I would entone
For having met thee ? and for having seen
Thy face an instant in the bower serene
Of perfect faith ? The splendour was thine own,
The rapture mine ; and Doubt was overthrown,
And Grief forgot the keynote of its threne.

IV.

I rose in haste. I seiz'd, as in a trance,
My violin, the friend I love the best
(After thyself, sweet soul !) and widely press'd,
And firmly drew it, with a master's glance,
Straight to my heart ! The sunbeams seem'd to dance
Athwart the strings, to rob me of my rest.

V.

For then a living thing it did appear,
And every chord had sympathies for me :
And something like a lover's lowly plea
Did shake its frame, and something like a tear
Fell on my cheek, to mind me of the year
When first we met, we two, beside the sea.

VI.

I stood erect, I proudly lifted up
The Sword of Song, the bow that trembled now,
As if for joy, my grief to disallow :—
Are there not some who, in the choicest cup,
Imbibe despair, and famish as they sup,
Sear'd by a solace that was like a vow ?

VII.

Are there not some who weep, and cannot tell
Why it is thus ? And others who repeat
Stories of ice, to cool them in the heat ?
And some who quake for doubts they cannot quell,
And yet are brave ? And some who smile in Hell
For thinking of the sin that was so sweet ?

VIII.

I have been one who, in the glow of youth,
Have liv'd in books, and realised a bliss
Unfelt by misers, when they count and kiss
Their minted joys ; and I have known, in sooth,
The taste of water from the well of Truth,
And found it good. But time has alter'd this.

IX.

I have been hated, scorn'd, and thrust away,
By one who is the Regent of the flowers,
By one who, in the magic of her powers,
Changes the day to night, the night to day,
And makes a potion of the solar ray
Which drugs my heart, and deadens it for hours.

X.

I have been taught that Happiness is coy,
And will not come to all who bend the knee ;
That Faith is like the foam upon the sea,
And Pride a snare, and Pomp a foolish toy,
And Hope a moth whose wings we may destroy ;
And she I love has taught these things to me.

XI.

Yes, thou, my Lady ! Thou hast made me feel
The pangs of that Prometheus who was chain'd
And would not bow, but evermore maintain'd
A fierce revolt. Have I refused to kneel ?
I do it gladly. But to mine appeal
No answer comes, and none will be ordain'd.

XII.

Why, then, this rancour? Why so cold a thing
As thy displeasure, O thou dearest One?
I meant no wrong. I stole not from the sun
The fire of Heaven; but I did seek to bring
Glory from thee to me; and in the Spring
I pray'd the prayer that left me thus undone.

XIII.

I pray'd my prayer. I wove into my song
Fervour, and joy, and mystery, and the bleak,
The wan despair that words can never speak.
I pray'd as if my spirit did belong
To some old master, who was wise and strong
Because he lov'd, and suffer'd, and was weak.

XIV.

I curb'd the notes, convulsive, to a sigh,
And, when they falter'd most, I made them leap
Fierce from my bow, as from a summer sleep
A young she-devil. I was fired thereby
To bolder efforts, and a muffled cry
Came from the strings, as if a saint did weep.

XV.

I changed the theme. I dallied with the bow
Just time enough to fit it to a mesh
Of merry notes, and drew it back afresh
To talk of truth and constancy and woe,
And life, and love, and madness, and the glow
Of mine own soul which burns into my flesh.

XVI.

It was the Lord of music, it was he
Who seiz'd my hand. He forced me, as I play'd,
To think of that ill-fated fairy-glade
Where once we strolled at night ; and wild and free
My notes did ring ; and quickly unto me
There came the joy that maketh us afraid.

XVII.

Oh ! I shall die of tasting in my dreams
Poison of love and ecstasy of pain ;
For I shall never kneel to thee again,
Or sit in bowers, or wander by the streams
Of golden vales, or of the morning beams
Construct a wreath to crown thee on the plain !

XVIII.

Yet it were easy, too, to compass this,
So thou wert kind ; and easy to my soul
Were harder things if I could reach the goal
Of all I crave, and consummate a bliss
In mine own fashion, and compel a kiss
More fraught with honour than a king's control.

XIX.

It is not much to say that I would die ;—
It is not much to say that I would dare
Torture, and doom, and death, could I but share
One kiss with thee. For then, without a sigh,
I'd teach thee pity, and be graced thereby,
Wet with thy tears, and shrouded by thy hair.

XX.

It is not much to say that this is so ;
Yet I would sell my substance and my breath,
And all the joy that comes from Lazareth,
And all the peace that all the angel's know,
To lie with thee, one minute, in the snow
Of thy white bosom, ere I sank in death !

LETTER IV.
YEARNINGS.



LETTER IV.

YEARNINGS.

I.

THE earth is glad, I know, when night is spent,
For then she wakes the birdlings in the bowers ;
And, one by one, the rosy-footed hours
Start for the race ; and from his crimson tent
The soldier-sun looks o'er the firmament ;
And all his path is strewn with festal flowers.

II.

But what his mission ? What the happy quest
Of all this toil ? He journeys on his way
As Cæsar did, unbiass'd by the sway
Of maid or man. His goal is in the west,
Will he unbuckle there, and, in his rest,
Dream of the gods who died in Nero's day ?

III.

Will he arraign the traitor in his camp ?
The Winter Comet who, with streaming hair,
Attack'd the sweetest of the Pleiads fair
And ravish'd her, and left her in the damp
Of dull decay, nor re-illumed the lamp
That showed the place she occupied in air.

IV.

No ; 'tis not so ! He seeks his lady-moon,
The gentle orb for whom Endymion sigh'd,
And trusts to find her by the ocean tide,
Or near a forest in the coming June ;
For he has lov'd her since she late did swoon
In that eclipse of which she nearly died.

V.

He knew her then ; he knew her in the glow
Of all her charms. He knew that she was chaste,
And that she wore a girdle at her waist
Whiter than pearl. And when he eyed her so
He knew that in the final overthrow
He should prevail, and she should be embraced.

VI.

But were I minded thus, were I the sun,
And thou the moon, I would not bide so long
To hear the marvels of thy wedding-song ;
For I would have the planets, every one,
Conduct thee home, before the day was done,
And call thee queen, and crown thee in the throng.

VII.

And, like Apollo, I would flash on thee,
And rend thy veil, and call thee by the name
That Daphne lov'd, the loadstar of his fame ;
And make myself for thee as white to see
As whitest marble, and as wildly free
As Leda's lover with his look of flame.

VIII.

And there should then be fêtes that should not cease
Till I had kiss'd thee, lov'd one ! in a trance
Lasting a life-time, through a life's romance ;
And every star should have a mate apiece,
And I would teach them how, in ancient Greece,
The gods were masters of the maidens' dance.

IX.

I should be bold to act ; and thou should'st feel
Terror and joy combined, in all the span
Of thy sweet body, ere my fingers ran
From curl to curl, to prompt thee how to kneel,
And then, soul-stricken by thy mute appeal,
I should be quick to answer like a man.

X.

What ! have I sinn'd, dear Lady ? have I sinn'd
To talk so wildly ? Have I sinn'd in this ?
An angel's mouth was surely meant to kiss !
Or have I dreamt of courtship out in Inde
In some wild wood ? My soul is fever-thinn'd,
And fierce and faint, and frauded of its bliss.

XI.

I will not weep. I will not in the night
Weep or lament, or, bending on my knees,
Appeal for pity ! In the clustered trees
The wind is boasting of its one delight ;
And I will boast of mine, in thy despite,
And say I love thee more than all of these.

XII.

The rose in bloom, the linnet as it sings,
The fox, the fawn, the cygnet on the mere,
The dragon-fly that glitters like a spear,—
All these, and more, all these ecstatic things,
Possess their mates ; and some arrive on wings,
And some on webs, to make their meanings clear.

XIII.

Yea, all these things, and more than I can tell,
More than the most we know of, one and all,
Do talk of Love. There is no other call
From wind to wave, from rose to asphodel,
Than Love's alone—the thing we cannot quell,
Do what we will, from font to funeral.

XIV.

What have I done, I only on the earth,
That I should wait a century for a word ?
A hundred years, I know, have been deferr'd
Since last we met, and then it was in dearth
Of gladsome peace ; for, in a moment's girth,
My shuddering soul was wounded like a bird.

XV.

I knew thy voice. I knew the veering sound
Of that sweet oracle which once did tend
To treat me grandly, as we treat a friend ;
And I would know't if darkly underground
I lay as dead, or, down among the drown'd,
I blindly stared, unvalued to the end.

XVI.

There ! take again the kiss I took from thee
Last night in sleep. I met thee in a dream
And drew thee closer than a monk may deem
Good for the soul. I know not how it be,
But this I know : if God be good to me
I shall be raised again to thine esteem.

XVII.

I touched thy neck. I kiss'd it. I was bold.
And bold am I, to-day, to call to mind
How, in the night, a murmur not unkind
Broke on mine ear ; a something new and old
Quick in thy breath, as when a tale is told
Of some great hope with madness intertwined.

XVIII.

And round my lips, in joy and yet in fear,
There seemed to dart the stings of kisses warm.
These were my honey-bees, and soon would swarm
To choose their queen. But ere they did appear,
I heard again that murmur in mine ear
Which seem'd to speak of calm before a storm.

XIX.

“What is it, love?” I whispered in my sleep,
And turned to thee, as April unto May.
“Art mine in truth, mine own, by night and day,
Now and for ever?” And I heard thee weep,
And then persuade ; and then my soul did leap
Swiftly to thine, in love's ecstatic sway.

XX.

I fondled thee ! I drew thee to my heart,
Well knowing in the dark that joy is dumb.
And then a cry, a sigh, a sob, did come
Forth from thy lips. . . . I waken'd, with a start,
To find thee gone. The day had taken part
Against the total of my blisses' sum.

LETTER V.

CONFESSIONS.



LETTER V.

CONFESSIONS.

I.

O LADY mine ! O Lady of my Life !
Mine and not mine, a being of the sky
Turn'd into Woman, and I know not why—
Is't well, bethink thee, to maintain a strife
With thy poor servant ? War unto the knife,
Because I greet thee with a lover's eye ?

II.

Is't well to visit me with thy disdain,
And rack my soul, because, for love of thee,
I was too prone to sink upon my knee,
And too intent to make my meaning plain,
And too resolved to make my loss a gain
To do thee good, by Love's immortal plea ?

III.

O friend ! forgive me for my dream of bliss.
Forgive : forget : be just ! Wilt not forgive ?
Not though my tears should fall, as through a sieve
The salt sea-sand ? What joy hast thou in this :
To be a maid, and marvel at a kiss ?
Say ! Must I die, to prove that I can live ?

IV.

Shall this be so? E'en this? And all my love
Wreck'd in an instant? No, a gentle heart
Beats in thy bosom; and the shades depart
From all fair gardens, and from skies above,
When thou art near. For thou art like a dove,
And dainty thoughts are with thee where thou art.

V.

Oh! it is like the death of dearest kin,
To wake and find the fancies of the brain
Sear'd and confused. We languish in the strain
Of some lost music, and we find within,
Deep in the heart, the record of a sin,
The thrill thereof, and all the blissful pain.

VI.

For it is deadly sin to love too well,
And unappeased, unhonour'd, unbesought,
To feed on dreams; and yet 'tis aptly thought
That all must love. E'en those who most rebel
In Eros' camp have known his master-spell;
And more shall learn than Eros yet has taught.

VII.

But I am mad to love. I am not wise.
I am the worst of men to love the best
Of all sweet women! An untimely jest,
A thing made up of rhapsodies and sighs,
And unordained on earth, and in the skies,
And undesired in tumult and in rest.

VIII.

All this is true. I know it. I am he.
I am that man. I am the hated friend
Who once received a smile, and sought to mend
His soul with hope. O tyrant ! by the plea
Of all thy grace, do thou accept from me
At least the notes that know not to offend.

IX.

See ! I will strike again the major chord
Of that great song, which, in his early days,
Beethoven wrote ; and thine shall be the praise,
And thine the frenzy like a soldier's sword
Flashing therein ; and thine, O thou adored
And bright true Lady ! all the poet's lays.

X.

To thee, to thee, the songs of all my joy,
To thee the songs that wildly seem to bless,
And those that mind thee of a past caress.
Lo ! with a whisper to the Wingèd Boy
Who rules my fate, I will my strength employ
To make a matin-song of my distress.

XI.

But playing thus, and toying with the notes,
I half forget the cause I have to weep ;
And, like a reaper in the realms of sleep,
I hear the bird of morning where he floats
High in the welkin, and in fairy boats
I see the minstrels sail upon the deep.

XII.

In mid-suspension of my leaping bow
I almost hear the silence of the night ;
And, in my soul, I know the stars are bright
Because they love, and that they nightly glow
To make it clear that there is nought below,
And nought above, so fair as Love's delight.

XIII.

But shall I touch thy heart by speech alone,
Without Amati? Shall I prove, by words,
That hope is meant for men as well as birds ;
That I would take a scorpion, or a stone,
In lieu of gold, and sacrifice a throne
To be the keeper of thy flocks and herds ?

XIV.

Ah, no, my Lady ! though I sang to thee
With fuller voice than sings the nightingale—
Fuller and softer in the moonlight pale
Than lays of Keats, or Shelley, or the free
And fire-lipp'd Byron—there would come to me
No word of thine to thank me for the tale.

XV.

Thou would'st not heed. Thou would'st not any-when,
In bower or grove—or in the holy nook
Which shields thy bed—thou would'st not care to
look
For thoughts of mine, though faithful in their ken
As are the minds of England's fighting men
When they inscribe their names in Honour's book.

XVI.

Thou would'st not care to scan my face, and through
This face of mine, the soul, for scraps of thought.
Yet 'tis a face that somewhere has been taught
To smile in tears. Mine eyes are somewhat blue
And quick to flash (if what I hear be true)
And dark, at times, as velvet newly wrought.

XVII.

But wilt thou own it? Wilt thou, in the scroll
Of my sad life, perceive, as in a hive,
A thousand happy fancies that contrive
To seek thee out? Thy bosom is the goal
Of all my thoughts, and quick to thy control
They wend their way, elate to be alive.

XVIII.

But there is something I could never bring
My soul to compass. No! could I compel
Thy plighted troth, I would not have thee tell
A lie to God. I'll have no wedding-ring
With loveless hands around my neck to cling;
For this were worse than all the fires of hell.

XIX.

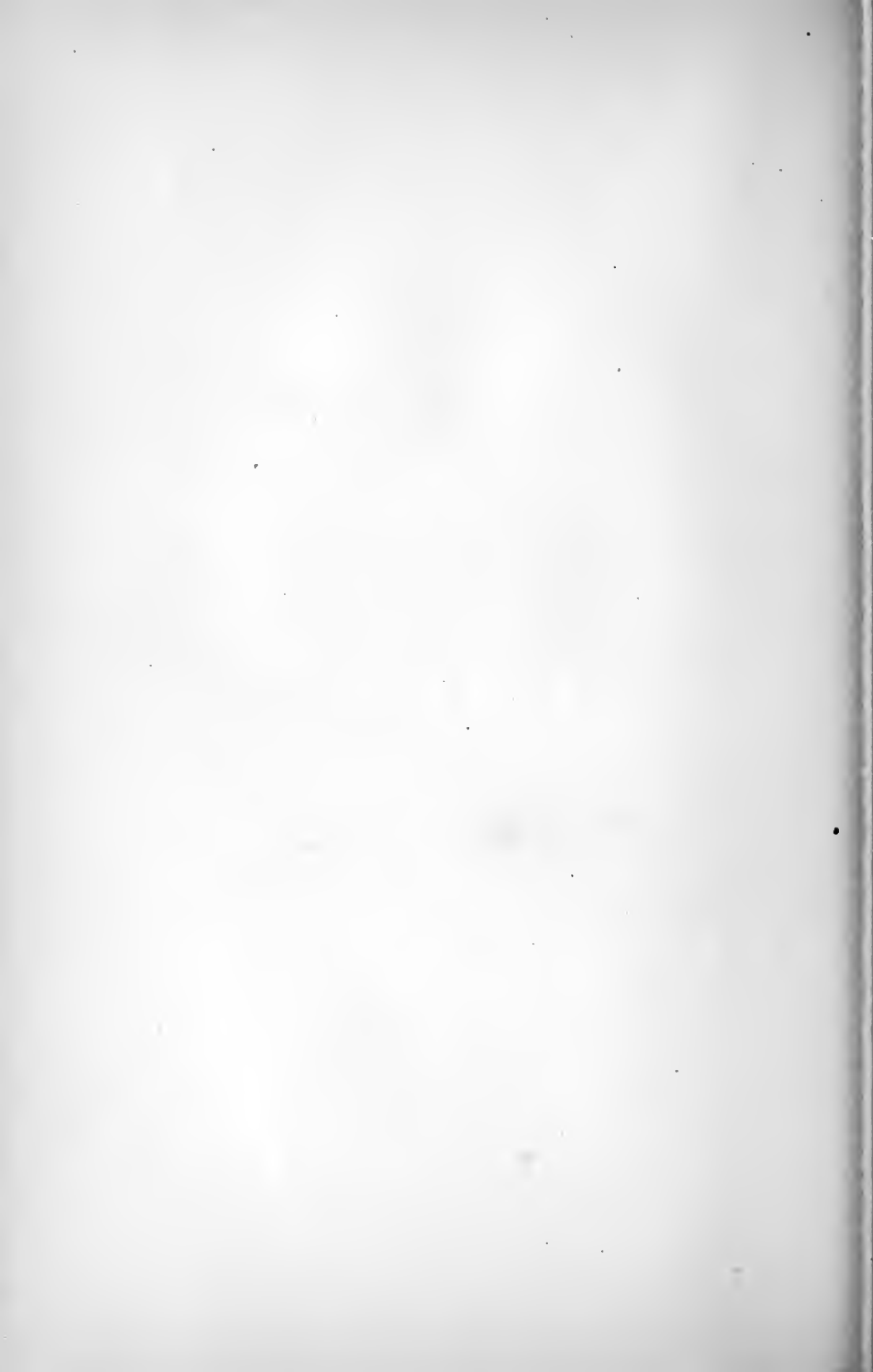
I would not take thee from a lover's lips,
Or from the rostrum of a roaring crowd,
Or from the memory of a husband's shroud,
Or from the goblet where a Cæsar sips.
I would not touch thee with my finger tips,
But I would die to serve thee—and be proud.

XX.

And could I enter Heaven, and find therein,
In all the wide dominions of the air,
No trace of thee among the natives there,
I would not bide with them—No! not to win
A seraph's lyre—but I would sin a sin,
And free my soul, and seek thee elsewhere!

LETTER VI.

DESPAIR.



LETTER VI.

DESPAIR.

I.

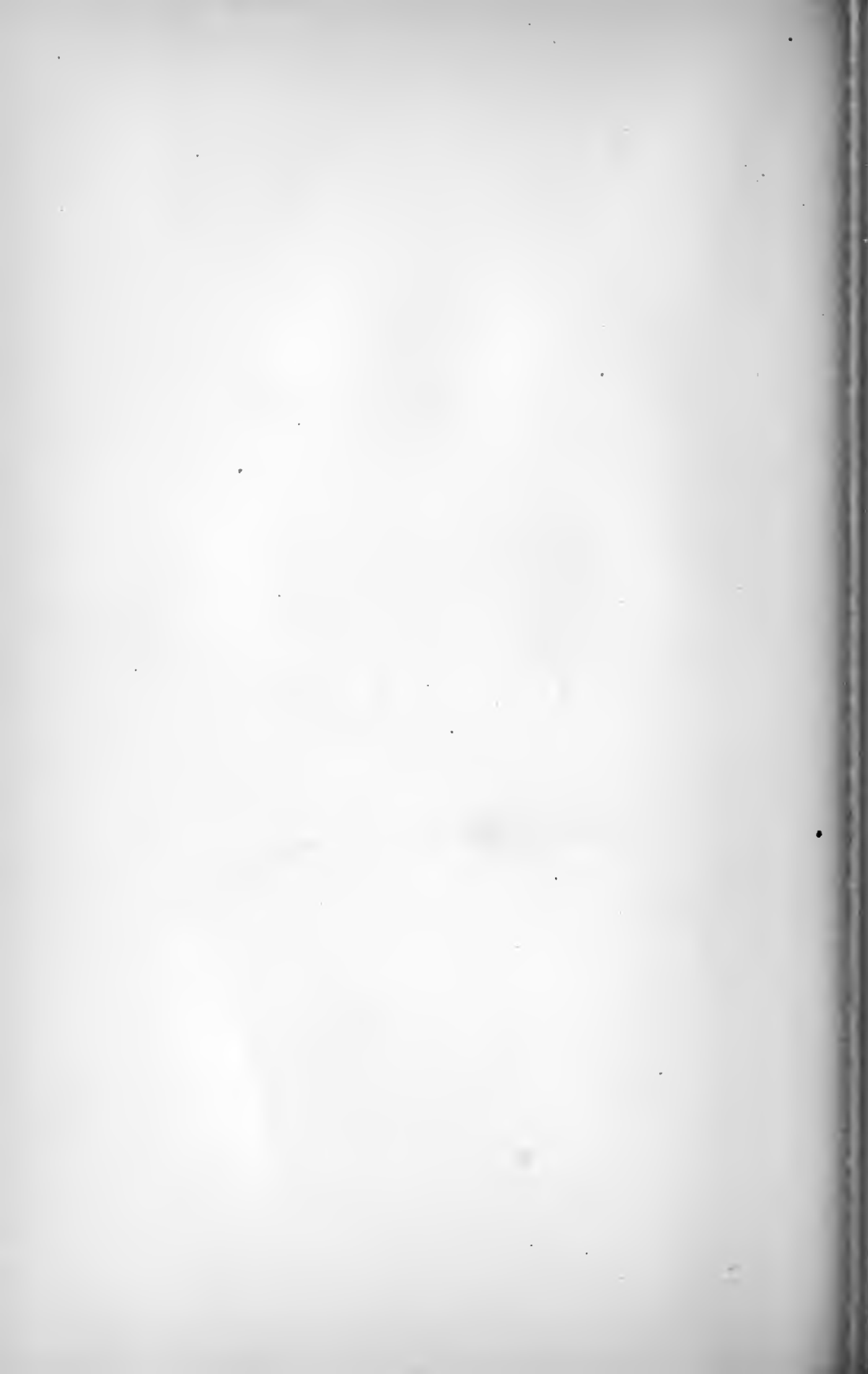
I AM undone. My hopes have beggar'd me,
For I have lov'd where loving was denied.
To-day is dark, and Yesterday has died,
And when To-morrow comes, erect and free,
Like some great king, whose tyrant will he be,
And whose defender in the days of pride?

II.

I am not cold, and yet November bands
Compress my heart. I know the month is May,
And that the sun will warm me if I stay.
But who is this? Oh, who is this that stands
Straight in my path, and with his bony hands
Appeals to me to turn some other way?

III.

It is the phantom of my murder'd joy,
Which once again has come to persecute,
And tell me tales which late I did refute.
But ! I now must heed them, as a boy
Takes up, in tears, the remnants of a toy,
Or bard forlorn the fragments of a lute.



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Or bard forlorn the fragments of a lute.

IV.

It is the ghost that, day by day, did come
To tempt my spirit to the mountain-peak ;
It is the thing that wept, and would not speak,
And, with a sign, to show that it was dumb,
Did seem to hint at Death that was the sum
Of all we know, and all we strive to seek.

V.

And now it comes again, and with its eye
Bloodshot and blear, though pallid in its face,
Doth point, exacting, to the very place
Where I do keep, that no one may descry,
A lady's glove, a ribbon, and a dry,
A perjur'd rose, which oft I did embrace.

VI.

It means, perchance, that I must make an end
Of all these things, and burn them as a fee
To my despair, when down upon my knee.
O piteous thing ! have pity ; be my friend ;
Or say, at least, that blessings will descend
On her I love, on her if not on me !

VII.

The Shape did smile ; and, wildly, with a start,
Did shrivel up, as when a fire is spent,
Whereof the smoke obscured the firmament.
And then I knew it had but tried my heart,
To teach me how to play a manly part,
And strengthen me in all my good intent.

VIII.

And here I stand alone, e'en like a leaf
In sudden frost, as quiet as the wing
Of wounded bird, which knows it cannot sing.
A child may moan, but not a mountain chief.
If we be sad, if we possess a grief,
The grief should be the slave, and not the king.

IX.

Yes, I will pause, and pluck from out the Past
The full discernment of my sorry cheer,
And why the sunlight seems no longer clear,
And why, in spite of anguish, and the vast,
The sickly blank that o'er my life is cast,
I cannot kneel to-day, or shed a tear.

X.

It was thy friendship. It was this I had,
This and no more. I was a fool to doubt,
I was a fool to strive to put to rout
My many foes—thy musings tender-glad,
Which all had said :—“ Avoid him ! he is mad—
Mad with his love, and Love's erratic shout.”

XI.

I should have known—I should have guess'd in time—
That, like a soft mirage at twilight hour,
My dream would melt, and rob me of its dower.
I should have guess'd that all the heights sublime,
Which look'd like spires and cities built in rhyme.
Would droop and die, like petals from a flower.

XII.

I should have known, indeed, that to the brave
All things are servants. But my lost Delight
Was like the ship that founders in a night,
And leaves no mark. How then? Is Passion's grave
All that is left beside the sobbing wave?
The foam thereof, the saltness, and the blight?

XIII.

I had a fleet of ships, and where are they?
Where are they all? and where the merchandise
I treasured once—an empire's golden prize,
The empire of a soul, which, in a day,
Lost all its wealth? I was deceiv'd, I say,
For I had reckon'd on propitious skies.

XIV.

I look'd afar, and saw no sign of wrack.
I look'd anear, and felt the summer breeze
Warm on my cheek; and forth upon the seas
I sent my ships; and would not have them back,
Though some averr'd a storm was on the track
Of all I lov'd and all I own'd of these.

XV.

One ship was "Joy," the second "Truth," the third
"Love in a Dream," and, last, not least of all,
"Hope," and "Content," and "Pride that hath a Fall."
And they were goodly vessels, by my word,
With sails as strong as pinions of a bird,
And crew that answer'd well to Duty's call.

XVI.

In one of these—in “Hope”—where I did fly
A lofty banner,—in this ship I found
Doom’s-day at last, and all my crew were drown’d.
Yes, I was wreck’d in this, and here I lie,
Here on the beach, forlorn and like to die,
With none to pray for me on holy ground.

XVII.

O sweet my Lady ! If thou pass this way,
If thou behold me where I lie beset
By wind and wave, and powerless to forget,
Wilt not approach me thoughtfully and say :—
“This man was true. He lov’d me night and day,
And, though I spurn’d at him, he loves me yet?”

XVIII.

Wilt not withhold thy blame, at least to-night,
And shed for me a tear, as one my grieve
For people known in books, for men who weave
Ropes out of sand, to lead them to the light?
Oh ! treat me thus, and, by thy hand so white,
I will forego the dreams to which I cleave.

XIX.

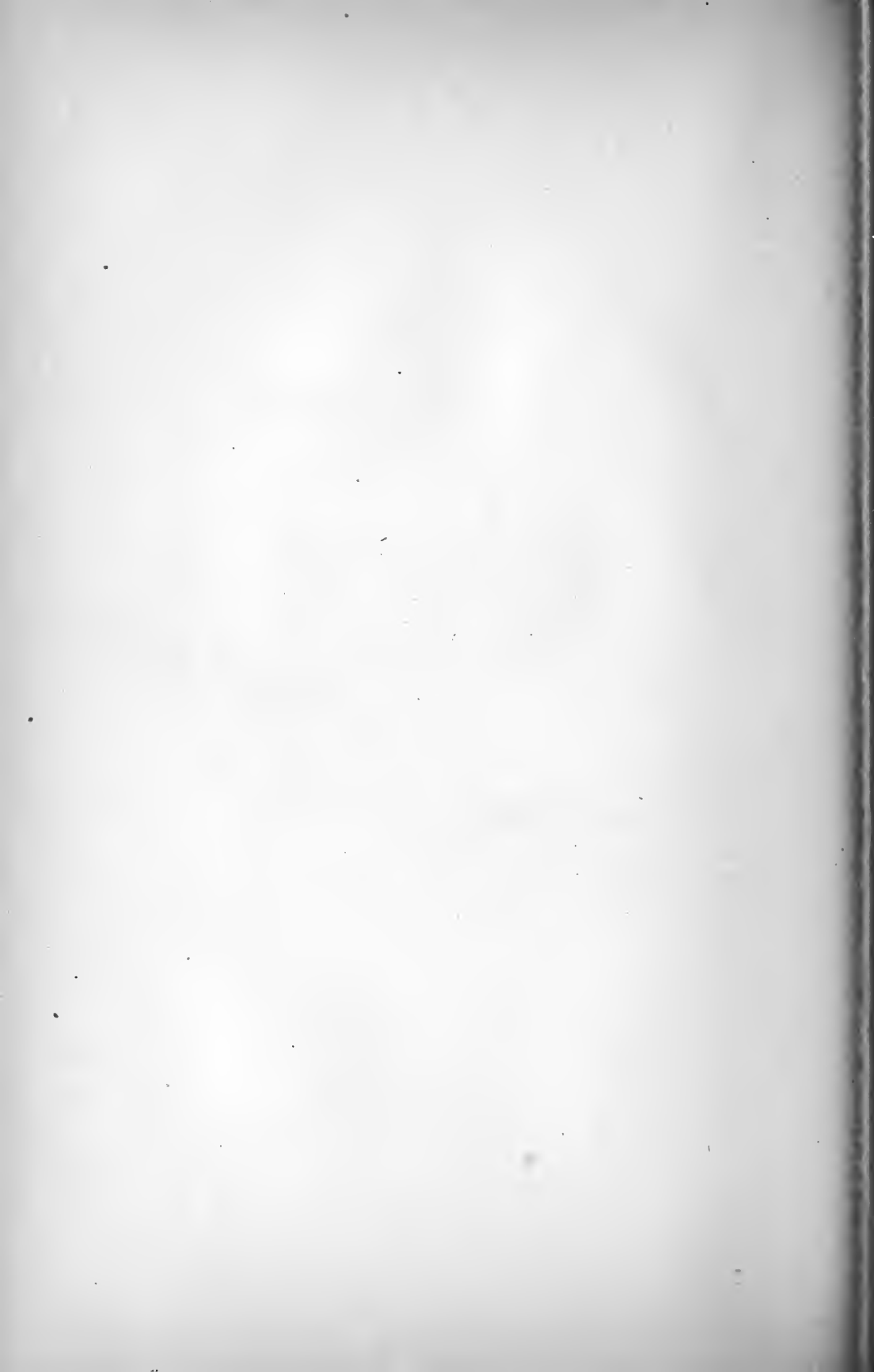
Be just to me, and say, when all is o’er,
When some such book is calmly laid aside :—
“The shadow-men have liv’d and loved and died ;
The shadow-women will be vexed no more.
But there is One for whom my heart is sore,
Because he took a shadow for his guide.”

XX.

Say only this ; but pray for me withal,
And let a pitying thought possess thee then,
Whether at home, at sea, or in a glen
In some wild nook. It were a joy to fall
Dead at thy feet, as at a trumpet's call,
For I should then be peerless among men

LETTER VII.

HOPE.



LETTER VII.

HOPE.

I.

O TEARS of mine ! Ye start I know not why,
Unless, indeed, to prove that I am glad,
Albeit fast wedded to a thought so sad
I scarce can deem that my despair will die,
Or that the sun, careering up the sky,
Will warm again a world that seem'd so mad.

II.

And yet, who knows? The world is, to the mind,
Much as we make it ; and the things we tend
Wear, for the nonce, the liveries that we lend.
And some such things are fair, though ill-defined,
And some are scathing, like the wintry wind ;
And some begin, and some will never end.

III.

How can I think, ye tears ! that I have been
The thing I was—so doubting, so unfit,
And so unblest, with brows for ever knit,
And hair unkempt, and face becoming lean
And cold and pale, as if I late had seen
Medusa's head, and all the scowls of it ?

IV.

Oh, why is this? Oh, why have I so long
Brooded on grief, and made myself a bane
To golden fields, and all the happy plain
Where once I met the Lady of my Song,
The lady for whose sake I shall be strong,
But never weak or diffident again?

V.

I was too shorn of hope. I did employ
Words like a mourner ; and to Her I bow'd,
As one might kneel to Glory in its shroud.
But I am crown'd to-day, and not so coy—
Crown'd with a kiss, and sceptred with a joy ;
And all the world shall see that I am proud.

VI.

I shall be sated now. I shall receive
More than the guerdon of my wildest thought,
More than the most that ecstasy has taught
To saints in Heaven ; and more than poets weave
In madcap verse, to warn us, or deceive ;
And more than Adam knew ere Eve was brought.

VII.

I know the meaning now of all the signs,
And all the joys I dreamt of in my dreams.
I realise the comfort of the streams,
When they reflect the shadows of the pines.
I know that there is hope for celandines,
And that a tree is merrier than it seems.

VIII.

I know the mighty hills have much to tell ;
And that they quake, at times, in undertone,
And talk to stars, because so much alone
And so unlov'd. I know that, in the dell,
Flowers are betroth'd, and that a wedding-bell
Rings in the breeze on which a moth has flown.

IX.

I know such things, because to loving hearts
Nature is keen, and pleasures, long delay'd,
Quicken the pulse, and turn a truant shade
Into a sprite, equipp'd with all the darts
That once were Cupid's ; and the day departs,
And sun and moon conjoin, as man with maid.

X.

The lover knows how grand a thing is love,
How grand, how sweet a thing, and how divine,
More than the pouring out of choicest wine ;
More than the whiteness of the whitest dove ;
More than the glittering of the stars above ;
And such a love, O Love ! is thine and mine.

XI.

To me the world, to-day, has grown so fair
I dare not trust myself to think of it.
Visions of light around me seem to flit,
And Phœbus loosens all his golden hair
Right down the sky ; and daisies turn and stare
At things we see not with our human wit.

XII.

And here, beside me, there are mosses green
In shelter'd nooks, and gnats in bright array,
And lordly beetles out for holiday ;
And spiders small that work in silver sheen
To make a kirtle for the Fairy Queen,
That she may don it on the First of May.

XIII.

I hear in thought, I hear the very words
That Arethusa, turn'd into a brook,
Spoke to Diana, when her leave she took
Of all she lov'd—low-weeping as the birds
Shrill'd out of tune, and all the frighten'd herds
Scamper'd to death, in spite of pipe and crook.

XIV.

I know, to-day, why winds were made to sigh,
And why they hide themselves, and why they gloat
In some old ruin ! Mote confers with mote,
And shell with shell ; and corals live and die,
And die and live, below the deep. And why ?
To make a necklace for my lady's throat.

XV.

And yet the world, in all its varied girth,
Lacks what we look for. There is something base
In mere existence—something in the face
Of men and women which accepts the earth,
And all its havings, as its right of birth,
But not its quittance, not its resting-place.

XVI.

There have been moments, at the set of sun,
When I have long'd for wings upon the wind,
That I might seek a planet to my mind,
More full-develop'd than this present one ;
With more of scope, when all is said and done,
To satisfy the wants of human kind.

XVII.

A world with thee, a home in some remote
And unknown region, which no sage's ken
Has compass'd yet ; of which no human pen
Has traced the limits ; where no terrors float
In wind or wave, and where the soul may note
A thousand raptures unreveal'd to men.

XVIII.

To be transported in a magic car,
On some transcendent night in early June,
Beyond the horn'd projections of the moon ;
To have our being in a bridal star,
In lands of light, where only angels are,
Athwart the spaces where the comets swoon.

XIX.

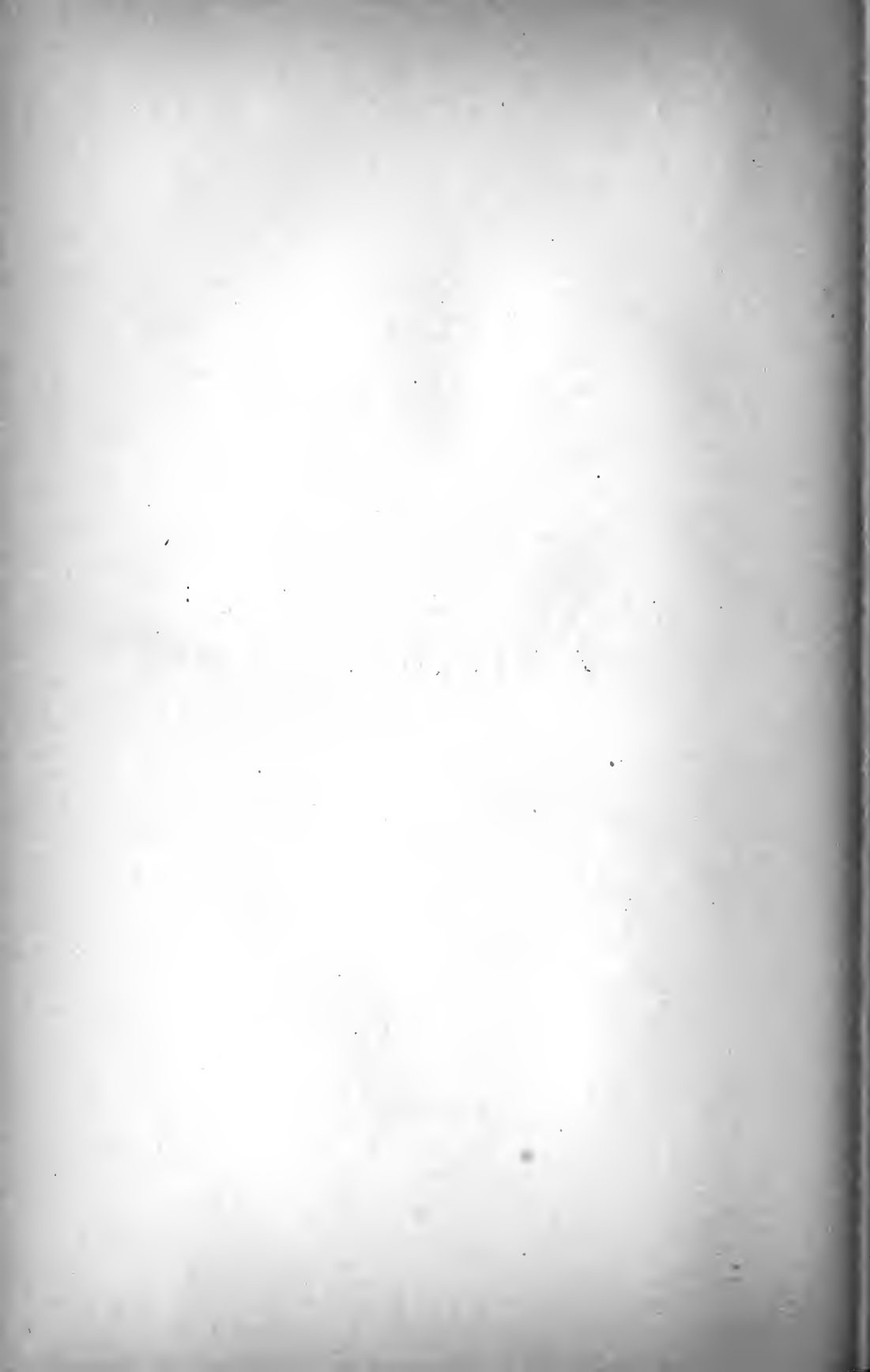
To be all this : to have in our estate
Worlds without stint, and quit them for the clay
Of some new planet where a summer's day
Lasts fifty years ; and there to celebrate
Our Golden Wedding, by the will of Fate—
This were a subject for a seraph's lay.

XX.

This were a life to live,—a life indeed,—
A thing to die for ; if, in truth, we die
When we but put our mortal vestments by.
This were a climax for a lover's need
Sweeter than songs, and holier than the creed
Of half the zealots who have sought the sky.

LETTER VIII.

A VISION.



LETTER VIII.

A VISION.

I.

YES, I will tell thee what, a week ago,
I dreamt of thee, and all the joy therein
Which I conceiv'd, and all the holy din
Of throbbing music, which appear'd to flow.
From room to room, as if to make me know
The power thereof to lead me out of sin.

II.

Methought I saw thee in a ray of light,
This side a grove—a dream within a dream—
With eyes of tender pleading, and the gleam
Of far-off summers in thy tresses bright ;
And I did tremble at the gracious sight,
As one who sees a naiad in a stream.

III.

I follow'd thee. I knew that, in the wood,
Where thus we met, there was a trysting-place.
I follow'd thee, as mortals in a chase
Follow the deer. I knew that it was good
To track thy step, and promptly understood
The fitful blush that flutter'd to thy face.

IV.

I followed thee to where a brook did run
Close to a grot ; and there I knelt to thee.
And then a score of birds flew over me—
Birds which arrived because the day was done,
To sing the Sanctus of the setting sun ;
And then I heard thy voice upon the lea.

V.

“Follow !” it cried. I rose and follow’d fast ;
And, in my dream, I felt the dream was true,
And that, full soon, Titania, with her crew
Of imps and fays, would meet me on the blast.
But this was hindered ; and I quickly passed
Into the valley where the cedars grew.

VI.

And what a scene, O God ! and what repose,
And what sad splendour in the burning west :
A languid sun low-dropping to his rest,
And incense rising, as of old it rose,
To do him honour at the daylight’s close,—
The birds entranced, and all the winds repress’d.

VII.

I followed thee. I came to where a shrine
Stood in the trees, and where an oaken gate
Swung in the air, so turbulent of late.
I touch’d thy hand ; it quiver’d into mine ;
And then I look’d into thy face benign,
And saw the smile for which the angels wait.

VIII.

And lo ! the moon had sailed into the main
Of that blue sky, as if therein did poise
A silver boat ; and then a tuneful noise
Broke from the copse where late a breeze was slain ;
And nightingales, in ecstasy of pain,
Did break their hearts with singing the old joys.

IX.

“ Is this the spot ? ” I cried, “ is this the spot
Where I must tell thee all my heart’s desire ?
Is this the time when I must drink the fire,
And eat the snow, and find it fever-hot ?
I freeze with heat, and yet I fear it not ;
And all my pulses thrill me like a lyre.”

X.

A wondrous light was thrown upon thy face ;
It was the light within ; it was the ray
Of thine own soul. And then a voice did say,
“ Glory to God the King, and Jesu’s grace
Here and hereafter ! ” And about the place
A radiance shone surpassing that of day.

XI.

It was thy voice. It was the voice I prize
More than the sound of April in the dales,
More than the songs of larks and nightingales,
And more than teachings of the worldly-wise.
“ Glory to God,” it said, “ for, in the skies,
And here on earth, ’tis He alone prevails.”

XII.

And then I asked thee : " Shall I tell thee now
All that I think of, when, by land and sea,
The days and nights illumine the world for me ?
And how I muse on marriage, as I bow
In God's own places, with a throbbing brow ?
And how, at night, I dream of kissing thee ? "

XIII.

But thou did'st answer : " First behold this man !
He is thy lord, for love's and lady's sake ;
He is thy master, or I much mistake."
And I perceiv'd, hard by, a phantom wan
And wild and kingly, who did, walking, span
The open space that lay beside the brake.

XIV.

It was Beethoven. It was he who came
From monstrous shades, to journey yet awhile
In pleasant nooks, and vainly seek the smile
Of one lov'd woman—she to whom his fame
Had been a glory had she sought the same,
And lov'd a soul so grand, so free from guile.

XV.

It was the Kaiser of the land of song,
The giant-singer who did storm the gates
Of Heaven and Hell, a man to whom the Fates
Were fierce as furies, and who suffer'd wrong
And ached and bore it, and was brave and strong,
But gaunt as ocean when its rage abates.

XVI.

I knew his tread. I knew him by his look
Of pent-up sorrow—by his hair unkempt
And torn attire—and by his smile exempt
From all but pleading. Yet his body shook
With some great joy ; and onward he betook
His echoing steps the way that I had dreamt.

XVII.

I bow'd my head. The lordly being pass'd.
He was my king, and I did bow to him.
And when I rais'd mine eyes they were as dim
As tears could make them. And the moon, aghast,
Glared in the sky ; and westward came a blast
Which shook the earth like shouts of cherubim.

XVIII.

I held my breath. I could have fled the place,
As men have fled before the wrath of God.
But I beheld my Lady where she trod
The darken'd path ; and I did cry apace :
“ Help me, my Lady ! ” and thy lustrous face
Gladden'd the air, and quicken'd all the sod.

XIX.

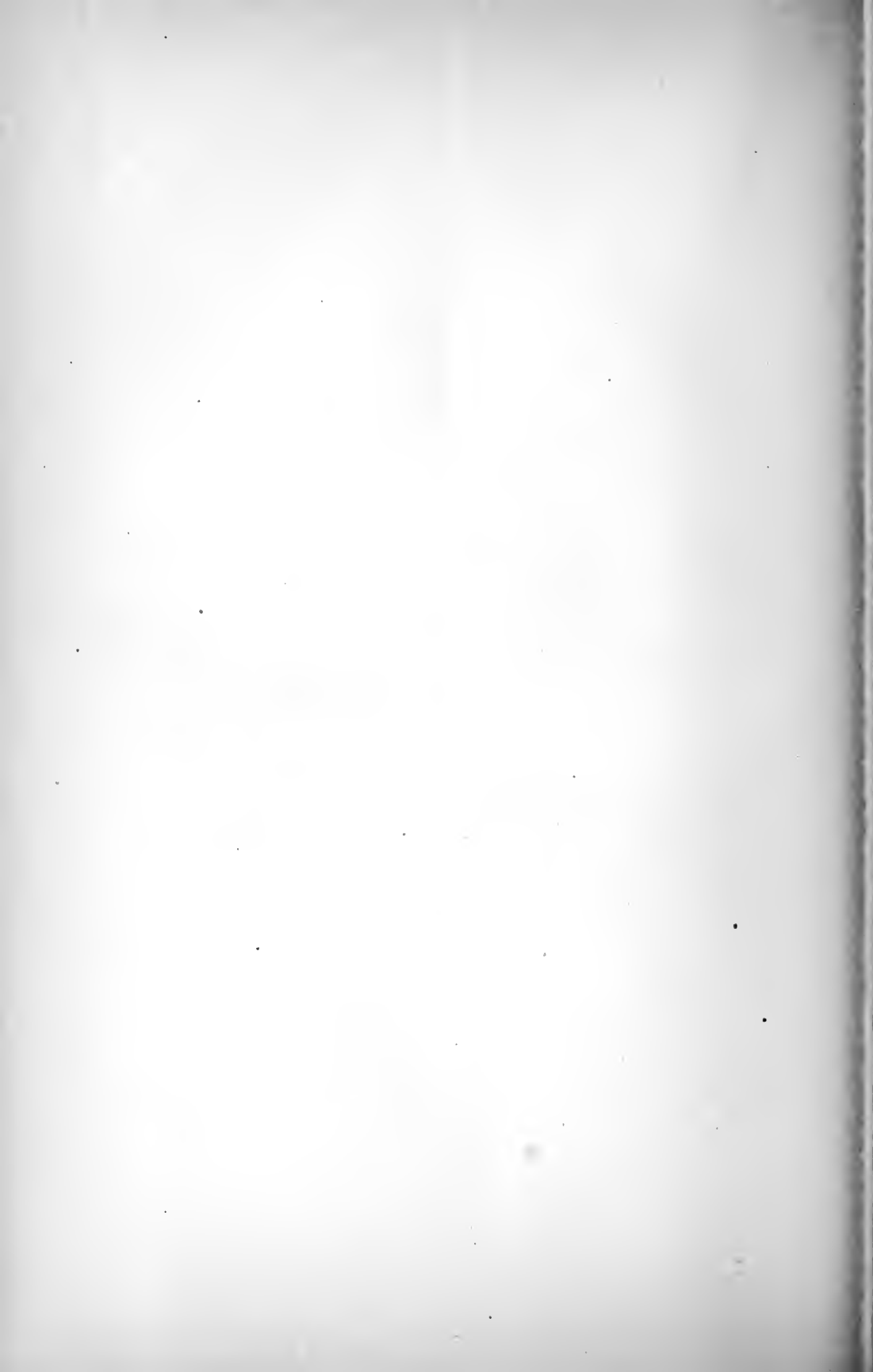
Then did I hear again that voice of cheer.
“ Lovest thou me,” it said, “ or music best ? ”
I seized thy hand, I drew thee to my breast.
“ Thee, only thee ! ” I cried. “ From year to year,
Thee, only thee—not fame ! ” And silver-clear,
Thy voice responded : “ God will grant the rest.”

XX.

I kiss'd thine eyes. I kiss'd them where the blue
Peep'd smiling forth ; and proudly as before
I heard the tones that thrill'd me to the core.
“If thou love me,” they said, “if thou be true,
Thou shalt have fame, and love, and music too !”
Entranced I kiss'd the lips that I adore.

LETTER IX.

TO-MORROW.



LETTER IX.

TO-MORROW.

I.

O LOVE! O Love! O Gateway of Delight!
Thou porch of peace, thou pageant of the prime
Of all God's creatures! I am here to climb
Thine upward steps, and daily and by night
To gaze beyond them, and to search aright
The far-off splendour of thy track sublime.

II.

For, in thy precincts, on the further side,
Beyond the turret where the bells are rung,
Beyond the chapel where the rites are sung,
There is a garden fit for any bride.
O Love! by thee, by thee are sanctified
The joys thereof to keep our spirits young.

III.

By thee, dear Love! by thee, if all be well—
And we be wise enough to own the touch
Of some bright folly that has thrill'd us much—
By thee, till death, we may regain the spell
Of wizard Merlin, and in every dell
Confront a Muse, and bow to it as such.

IV.

Love ! Happy Love ! Behold me where I stand
This side thy portal, with my straining eyes
Turn'd to the Future. Cloudless are the skies,
And, far adown the road which thou hast spann'd,
I see the groves of that elected land
Which is the place I call my paradise.

V.

But what is this ? The plains are known to me ;
The hills are known, the fields, the little fence,
The noisy brook as clear as innocence,
And this old oak, the wonder of the lea,
Which stops the wind to know if there shall be
Sorrow for men, or pride, or recompense.

VI.

I know these things, yet hold it little blame
To know them not, though in their proud array,
The flowers advance to make the world so gay.
Ah, what a change ! The things I know by name
Look unfamiliar all, and, like a flame,
The roses burn upon the hedge to-day.

VII.

The grass is velvet. There are pearls thereon,
And golden signs, and braid that doth appear
Made for a bridal. This is fairy gear
If I mistake not. I shall know anon.
Nature herself will teach me how to con
The new-found words to thank the glowing year.

VIII.

This is the path that led me to the brook ;
And this the mead, and this the mossy slope,
And this the place where breezes did elope
With giddy moths, enamour'd of a look ;
And here I sat alone, or with a book,
Dreaming the dreams of constancy and hope.

IX.

I loved the river well ; but not till now
Did I perceive the marvels of the shore.
This is a cave, and this an emerald floor ;
And here Sir Eglantine might make a vow,
And here a king, a guilty king, might bow
Before a child, and break his word no more.

X.

The day is dying. I shall see him die,
And I shall watch the sunset, and the red
Of all that splendour when the day is dead.
And I shall see the stars upon the sky,
And think them torches that are lit on high
To light the Lord Apollo to his bed.

XI.

And sweet To-morrow, like a golden bark,
Will call for me, and lead me on apace
To where I shall behold, in all her grace,
Mine own true Lady, whom a happy lark
Did late salute, appointing, after dark,
A nightingale to carol in his place.

XII.

Oh, come to me ! Oh, come, beloved day,
O sweet To-morrow ! Youngest of the sons
Of old King Time, to whom Creation runs
As men to God. Oh, quickly with thy ray
Anoint my head, and teach me how to pray,
As gentle Jesus taught the little ones.

XIII.

I am aweary of the waiting hours,
I am aweary of the tardy night.
The hungry moments rob me of delight,
The crawling minutes steal away my powers ;
And I am sick at heart, as one who cowers,
In lonely haunts, remov'd from human sight.

XIV.

How shall I think the night was meant for sleep,
When I must count the dreadful hours thereof,
And cannot beat them down, or bid them doff
Their hateful masks ? A man may wake and weep
From hour to hour, and, in the silence deep,
See shadows move, and almost hear them scoff.

XV.

Oh, come to me, To-morrow ! like a friend,
And not as one who bideth for the clock.
Be swift to come, and I will hear thee knock,
And though the night refuse to make an end
Of her dull peace, I promptly will descend
And let thee in, and thank thee for the shock.

XVI.

Dear, good To-morrow ! in my life, till now,
I did not think to need thee quite so soon.
I did not think that I should hate the moon,
Or new or old, or that my fevered brow
Requir'd the sun to cool it. I will bow
To this new day, that he may grant the boon.

XVII.

Yes, 'twill consent. The day will dawn at last.
Day and the tide approach. They cannot rest.
They must approach. They must by every test
Of all men's knowledge, neither slow nor fast,
Approach and front us. When the night is past,
The morrow's dawn will lead me to my quest.

XVIII.

Then shall I tremble greatly, and be glad,
For I shall meet my true-love all alone,
And none shall tell me of her dainty zone,
And none shall say how sweetly she is clad ;
But I shall know it. Men may call me mad ;
But I shall know how bright the world has grown.

XIX.

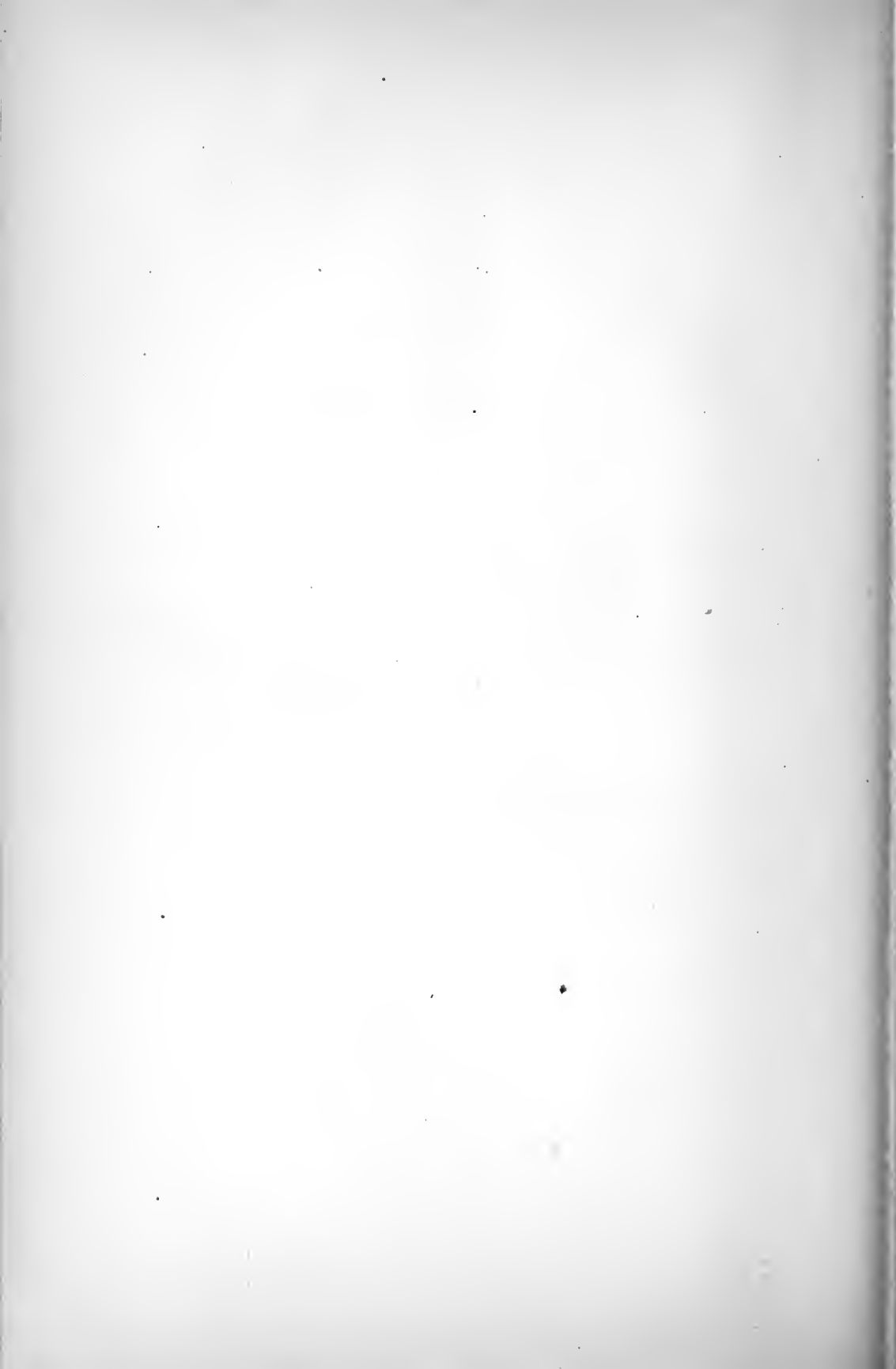
There is a grammar of the lips and eyes,
And I have learnt it. There are tokens sure
Of trust in love ; and I have found them pure.
Is love the guerdon then ? Is love the prize ?
It is ! It is ! We find it in the skies,
And here on earth 'tis all that will endure.

XX.

All things for love. All things in some divine
And wish'd for way, conspire, as Nature knows,
To some great good. Where'er a daisy grows
There grows a joy. The forest-trees combine
To talk of peace when mortals would repine ;
And he is false to God who flouts the rose.

LETTER X.

A RETROSPECT.



LETTER X.

A RETROSPECT.

I.

I WALK again beside the roaring sea
And once again I harken to the speech
Of waves exulting on the madden'd beach.
A sound of awful joy it seems to me,
A shuddering sound of God's eternity,—
Telling of things bevond the sage's reach.

II.

I walk alone. I see the bounding waves
Curl'd into foam. I watch them as they leap
Like wild sea-horses loosen'd from the deep.
And well I know that they have seen the graves
Of shipwreck'd sailors; for Disaster paves
The fearful fields where reapers cannot reap.

III.

Out there, in islands where the summer sun
Goes down in tempest, there are loathsome things
That crawl to shore, and flap unsightly wings.
But here there are no monsters that can run
To catch the limbs of bathers; no! not one;
And here the wind is harmless when it stings.

IV.

There is a glamour all about the bay,
As if the nymphs of Greece had tarried here.
The sands are golden, and the rocks appear
Crested with silver ; and the breezes play
Snatches of song they humm'd when far away,
And then are hush'd, as if from sudden fear.

V.

They think of thee. They hunt ; they meditate.
They will not quit the shore till they have seen
The very spot where thou did'st stand serene
In all thy beauty ; and of me they prate,
Knowing I love thee. And, like one elate,
The grand old sea remembers what hath been,

VI.

How many hours, how many days we met
Here on the beach, in that delirious time
When all the waves appear'd to break in rhyme.
Life was a joy, and love was like a debt
Paid and repaid in kisses—good to get,
And good to lose—unhoarded, yet sublime.

VII.

We wander'd here. We saw the tide advance.
We saw it ebb. We saw the widow'd shore
Waiting for Ocean with its organ roar,
Knowing that, day by day through happy chance,
She would be wooed anew, amid the dance
Of bridal waves, high-bounding as before.

VIII.

And I remember how, at flush of morn,
Thou didst depart alone, to find a nook
Where none could see thee ; where a lover's look
Were profanation worse than any scorn ;
And how I went my way, among the corn,
To wait for thee beside the Shepherd's Brook.

IX.

And lo ! from out a cave thou didst emerge,
Sweet as thyself, the flower of Womankind.
I know 'twas thus ; for, in my secret mind,
I see thee now. I see thee in the surge
Of those wild waves, well knowing that they urge
Some idle wish, untalk'd-of to the wind.

X.

I think the beach was thankful to have known
Thy warm, white body, and the blessedness
Of thy first shiver ; and I well can guess
How, when thy limbs were toss'd and overthrown,
The sea was pleased, and every smallest stone,
And every wave, was proud of thy caress.

XI.

A maiden diving, with dishevell'd hair,
Sheer from a rock ; a syren of the deep
Call'd into action, ere a wave could leap
Breast-high to daunt her ; Daphne, by a prayer,
Lured from a forest for the sea to bear—
This were a dream to fill a poet's sleep.

XII.

This were a thing for Phœbus to have eyed ;
And he did eye it. Yea, the Deathless One
Did eye thy beauty. It was madly done.
He saw thee in the rising of the tide.
He saw thee well. The truth is not denied :
The shore was proud to show thee to the sun.

XIII.

Never since Venus, at a god's decree,
Uprose from ocean, has there lived on earth.
A face like thine, a form of so much worth ;
And nowhere has the moon-obeying sea
Known such perfection, down from head to knee,
And knee to foot, since that Olympian birth.

XIV.

And, sooth, the moon was anxious to have placed
Her head beside thee, on the waters bright.
But she was foil'd ; for thou so late at night
Wouldst not go forth : no ! not to be embraced
By Nature's Queen, though, round about the waist,
She would have ring'd thee with her softest light.

XV.

Ah me ! had I a lute of sovereign power
I would enlarge on this, and plainly show
That there is nothing like thee here below,—
Nothing so comely, nothing in its dower
Of youth and grace, so like a human flower,
And white withal, and guiltless as the snow.

XVI.

For thou art fair as lilies, with the flush
That roses have while waiting for a kiss ;
And when thou smilest nothing comes amiss.
The earth is glad to see thy dimpled blush.
Had I the lute of Orpheus I would hush
All meaner sounds to tell the stars of this.

XVII.

I would, I swear, by Pallas' own consent,
Inform all creatures whom the stars behold
That thou art mine, and that a pen of gold,
With ink of fire, though by an angel lent,
Were all too poor to tell my true content,
And how I love thee seven times seventy fold.

XVIII.

And sure am I that, in the ancient days,
Achilles heard no voice so passing sweet,
And none so trancing, none that could compete
With thine for fervour ; none, in watery ways
Where Neptune dwelt, so worthy of the praise
Of Thetis' son, the sure and swift of feet.

XIX.

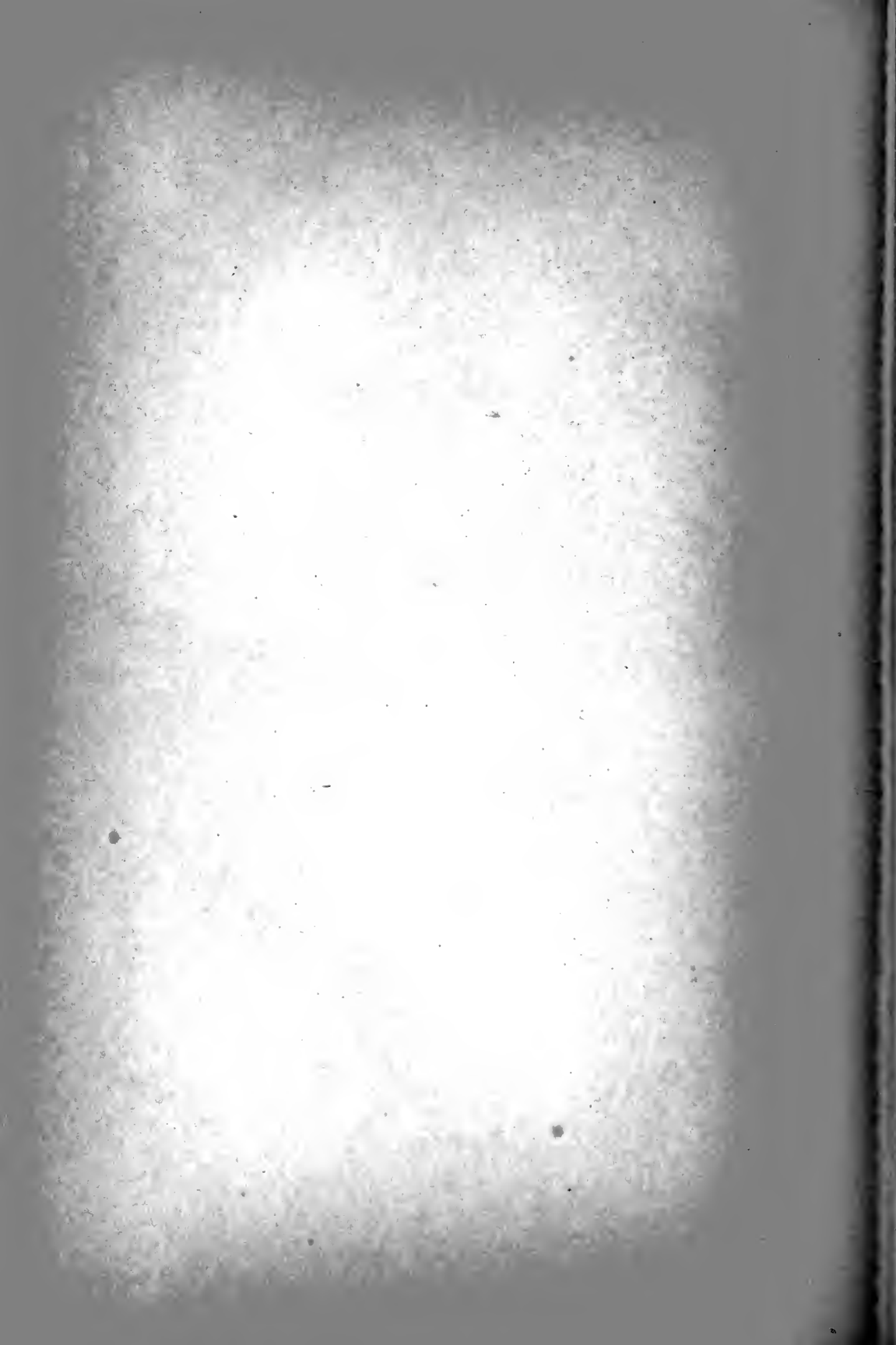
He never met upon the plains of Troy
Goddess or maiden so divinely fraught.
Not Helen's self, for whom the Trojans fought,
Was like to thee. Her love had much alloy,
But thine has none. Her beauty was a toy,
But thine's a gem, unsullied and unbought.

XX.

And ne'er was seen by poet, in a sweven,
An eye like thine, a face so fair to see
As that which makes the sunlight sweet to me.
Nor need I wait for death, or for the levin
In yonder cloud, to find the path to Heaven.
It fronts me here. 'Tis manifest in thee!

LETTER XI.

FAITH.



LETTER XI.

FAITH.

I.

Now will I sing to God a song of praise,
And thank the morning for the light it brings,
Aye! and the earth for every flower that springs,
And every tree that, in the jocund days,
Thrills to the blast. My voice I will upraise
To thank the world for every bird that sings.

II.

I will unpack my mind of all its fears.
I will advance to where the matin fires
Absorb the hills. My hopes and my desires
Will lead me safe ; and day will have no tears
And night no torture, as in former years,
To warp my nature when my soul aspires.

III.

I will endure. I will not strive to peep
Behind the barriers of the days to come,
Nor, adding up the figures of a sum,
Dispose of prayers as men dispose of sleep.
I cannot count the stars, or walk the deep ;
But I can pray, and Faith shall not be dumb.

IV.

I take myself and thee as mine estate—
Thee and myself. The world is centred there.
If thou be well I know the skies are fair ;
If not, they press me down with leaden weight,
And all is dark ; and morning comes too late ;
And all the birds are tuneless in the air.

V.

I need but thee : thee only. Thou alone
Art all my joy : a something to the sight
As grand as Silence, and as snowy white.
And do thou pardon if I make it known,
As oft I do, with mine Amati's tone,
Amid the stillness of the starry night.

VI.

Oh, give me pity of thy heart and mind,
Mine own sweet Lady, if I vex thee now.
If the repeating of my constant vow
Be undesired, have pity ! I were blind,
And deaf and dumb, and mad, were I inclined
To curb my feelings when to thee I bow.

VII.

Forgive the challenge of my longing lips
If these offend thee ; and forgive me, too,
If I perceive, within thine eyes of blue,
More than I utter—more than, in eclipse,
A man may note between the argent tips
Of frightened Dian whom the Fates pursue.

VIII.

It is the thing I dream of ; 'tis the thing
We know as rapture, when, with sudden thrill,
It snares the heart and subjugates the will ;
I mean the pride, the power, by which we cling
To natures nobler than the ones we bring,
To keep entire the fire we cannot chill.

IX.

Coyest of nymphs, my Lady ! whom I seek
As sailors seek salvation out at sea,
And poets fame, and soldiers victory, .
Behold ! I note the blush upon thy cheek,
The flag of truce that tells me thou art meek
And soon wilt yield thy fortress up to me.

X.

It is thy soul ; it is thy soul in arms
Which thus I conquer. All thy furtive sighs,
And all the glances of thy wistful eyes,
Proclaim the swift surrender of thy charms.
I kiss thy hand ; and tremors and alarms
Discard, in parting, all their late disguise.

XI.

They were not foes. They knew me, one and all ;
They knew I lov'd thee, and they lured me on
To try my fortune, and to wait thereon
For just reward. The scaling of the wall
Was not the meed ; there came the festival,
And now there comes the crown that I must don.

XII.

O my Belovèd ! I am king of thee,
And thou my queen ; and I will wear the crown
A little moment, for thy love's renown.
Yea, for a moment, it shall circle me,
And then be thine, so thou, upon thy knee,
Do seek the same, with all thy tresses down.

XIII.

For woman still is mistress of the man,
Though man be master. 'Tis the woman's right
To choose her king, and crown him in her sight.
And make him feel the pressure of the span
Of her soft arms, as only woman can ;
For, with her weakness, she excels his might.

XIV.

It is her joy indeed to be so frail
That he must shield her ; he of all the world
Whom most she loves ; and then, if he be hurl'd
To depths of sorrow, she will more avail
Than half a senate. Troubles may assail,
But she will guide him by her lips impearl'd.

XV.

A woman clung to Cæsar ; he was great,
And great the power he gain'd by sea and land.
But when he wrong'd her, when he spurn'd the
hand
Which once he knelt to, when he scoff'd at Fate,
Glory dispers'd, and left him desolate ;
For God remember'd all that first was plann'd.

XVI.

The cannon's roar, the wisdom of the sage,
The strength of armies, and the thrall of kings—
All these are weak compared to weaker things.
Napoleon fell because, in puny rage,
He wrong'd his house ; and earth became a cage
For this poor eagle with his batter'd wings.

XVII.

Believe me, Love ! I honour, night and day,
The name of Woman. 'Tis the nobler sex.
Villains may shame it ; sorrows may perplex ;
But still 'tis watchful. Man may take away
All its possessions, all its worldly sway,
And yet be worshipp'd by the soul he wrecks.

XVIII.

A word of love to Woman is as sweet
As nectar'd rapture in a golden bowl ;
And when she quaffs the heavens asunder roll,
And God looks through. And, from his judgment-
seat,
He blesses those who part, and those who meet,
And those who join the links of soul with soul.

XIX.

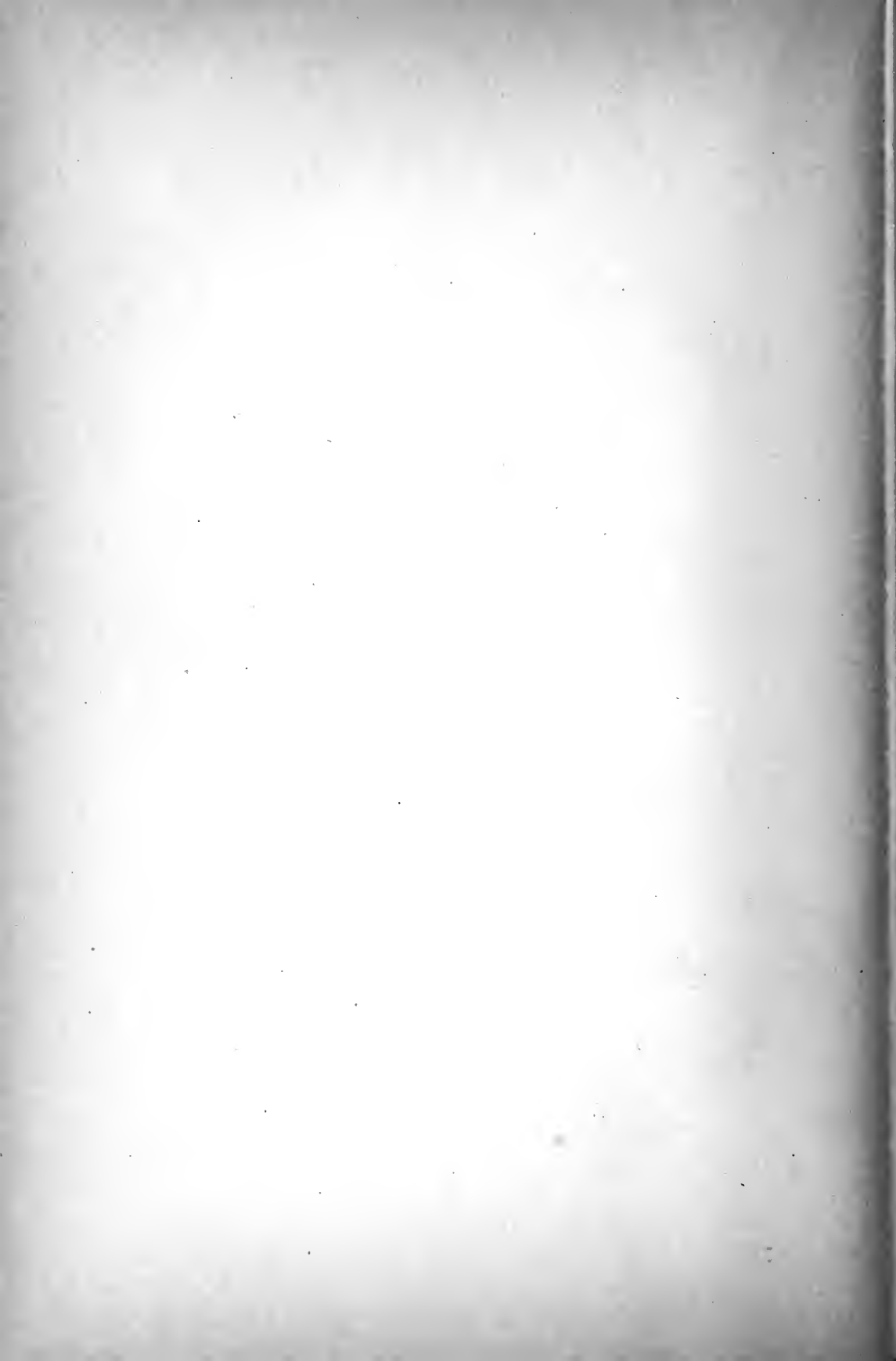
And are there none untrue ? God knows there are !
Aye, there are those who learn in time the laugh
That ends in madness—women who for chaff
Have sold their corn—who seek no guiding-star,
And find no faith to light them from afar ;
Of whom 'tis said : " They need no epitaph."

XX.

All this is known ; but lo ! for sake of One
Who lives in glory—for my mother's sake,
For thine, and hers, O Love !—I pity take
On all poor women. Jesu's will be done !
Honour for all, and infamy for none,
This side the borders of the burning lake.

LETTER XII.

VICTORY.



LETTER XII.

VICTORY.

I.

Now have I reach'd the goal of my desire,
For thou hast sworn—as sweetly as a bell
Makes out its chime—the oath I love to tell,
The fealty-oath of which I never tire.
The lordly forest seems a giant's lyre,
And sings, and rings, the thoughts that o'er it swell.

II.

The air is fill'd with voices. I have found
Comfort at last, enthrallment, and a joy
Past all belief ; a peace without alloy.
There is a splendour all about the ground
As if from Eden, when the world was drown'd,
Something had come which death could not destroy.

III.

It seems, indeed, as if to me were sent
A smile from Heaven—as if to-day the clods
Were lined with silk—the trees divining rods,
And roses gems for some high tournament.
I should not be so proud, or so content,
If I could sup, to-night, with all the gods.

IV.

A shrinèd saint would change his place with me
If he but knew the worth of what I feel.
He is enrobed indeed, and for his weal
Hath much concern ; but how forlorn is he !
How pale his pomp ! He cannot sue to thee,
But I am sainted every time I kneel.

V.

I walk'd abroad, to-day, ere yet the dark
Had left the hills, and down the beaten road
I saunter'd forth a mile from mine abode.
I heard, afar, the watchdog's sudden bark,
And, near at hand, the tuning of a lark,
Safe in its nest, but weighted with an ode.

VI.

The moon was pacing up the sky serene,
Pallid and pure, as if she late had shown
Her outmost side, and fear'd to make it known ;
And, like a nun, she gazed upon the scene
From bars of cloud that seemed to stand between,
And pray'd and smiled, and smiled and pray'd alone.

VII.

The stars had fled. Not one remain'd behind
To warn or comfort ; or to make amends
For hope delay'd,—for ecstasy that ends
At dawn's approach. The firmament was blind
Of all its eyes ; and, wanton up the wind,
There came the shuddering that the twilight sends.

VIII.

The hills exulted at the Morning's birth ;
And clouds assembled, quick, as heralds run
Before a king to say the fight is won.
The rich, warm daylight fell upon the earth
Like wine outpour'd in madness, or in mirth,
To celebrate the rising of the sun.

IX. .

And when the soaring lark had done his prayer,
The holy thing, self-poised amid the blue
Of that great sky, did seem, a space or two,
To pause and think, and then did clip the air
And dropped to earth to claim his guerdon there.
“ Thank God ! ” I cried, “ My dearest dream is true ! ”

X.

I was too happy, then, to leap and dance ;
But I could ponder ; I could gaze and gaze
From earth to sky and back to woodland ways.
The bird had thrill'd my heart, and cheer'd my glance,
For he had found to-day his nest-romance,
And lov'd a mate, and crown'd her with his praise.

XI.

Oh, Love ! my Love ! I would not for a throne,
I would not for the thrones of all the kings
Who yet have liv'd, or for a seraph's wings,
Or for the nod of Jove when night hath flown,
Consent to rule an empire all alone.
No ! I must have the grace of our two rings.

XII.

I must possess thee from the crowning curl
Down to the feet, and from the beaming eye
Down to the bosom where my treasures lie,
From blush to blush, and from the rows of pearl
That light thy smile, I must possess thee, girl,
And be thy lord and master till I die.

XIII.

This, and no less : the keeper of thy fame,
The proud controller of each silken tress,
And each dear item of thy loveliness,
And every oath, and every dainty name
Known to a bride : a picture in a frame
Of golden hair, to turn to and caress.

XIV.

And though I know thee prone, in vacant hours,
To laugh and talk with those who circumvent
And make mad speeches ; though I know the bent
Of some such men, and though in ladies' bowers
They brag of swords—I know my proven powers ;
I know myself and thee, and am content.

XV.

I know myself ; and why should I demur ?
The lily, bowing to the breeze's play,
Is not forgetful of the sun in May.
She is his nymph, and with a servitor
She doth but jest. The sun looks down at her,
And knows her true, and loves her day by day.

XVI.

E'en so I thee, O Lady of my heart !
O Lady white as lilies on the lea,
And fair as foam upon the ocean free
Whereon the sun hath sent a shining dart !
E'en so I love thee, blameless as thou art,
And with my soul's desire I compass thee.

XVII.

For thou art Woman in the sweetest sense
Of true endowment, and a bride indeed
Fit for Apollo. This is Woman's need :
To be a beacon when the air is dense,
A bower of peace, a life-long recompense—
This is the sum of Woman's worldly creed.

XVIII.

And what is Man the while ? And what his will ?
And what the furtherance of his earthly hope ?
To turn to Faith, to turn, as to a rope
A drowning sailor ; all his blood to spill
For one he loves, to keep her out of ill—
This is the will of Man, and this his scope.

XIX.

'Tis like the tranquil sea, that knows anon
It can be wild, and keep away from home
A thousand ships—and lash itself to foam—
And beat the shore, and all that lies thereon—
And catch the thunder ere the flash has gone
Forth from the cloud that spans it like a dome.

XX.

This is the will of Man, and this is mine.

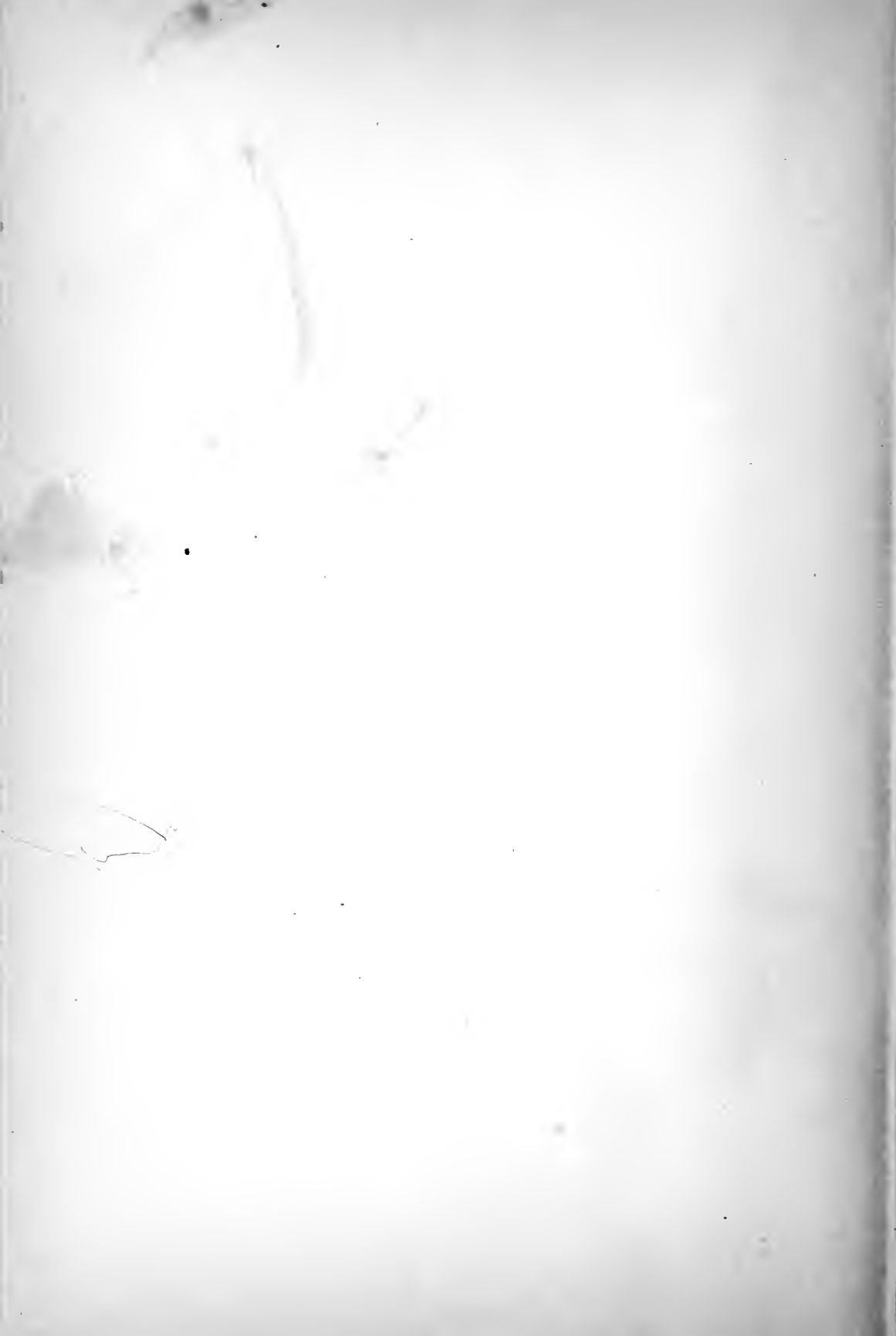
But lo ! I love thee more than wealth or fame,

More than myself, and more than those who came
With Christ's commission from the goal divine.

Soul of my soul, and mine as I am thine,

I cling to thee, my Life ! as fire to flame.

GLADYS THE SINGER.



GLADYS THE SINGER.

CANTO FIRST.

Ye who have known the pangs that lovers know,
The tears, the tremors, and the sovereign glow
Of some enthrallment fresh from Fairyland,
And, therewithal, the sprites, who in a band
Uphold, unseen, the courtship of true men,—
O ye bright souls ! for whom, with faltering pen,
I trace, e'en now, this tale of love and pride,
Accept, I pray you, safe and sanctified,—
My lovers twain who fared not righteously !
For you have loved as they, in their degree,
And hoped as they, and sighed as they have done,
And sought the folly which is barred to none,
But stands and smiles and waits for us alway.
And lo ! I note the things, that, day by day,
You guard and foster with enravished eyes,
And how you count the toys of your emprise :—
The keepsake flower—the curl that's passion-dear—
The scented scroll that's read from year to year.
And while I note these things and muse thereon,
I think of those sweet souls beyond the dawn
Whose love was flame. O deathless ! O ye dead !
Are ye well met ? Have ye no tears to shed,

Not e'en for joy? Is love not worth a kiss
Up there in Heaven? A mere seraphic bliss,
Fit for a saint? God help us then, each one!
And you my brothers—you, this side the sun,
Who love true-love—believe this much of me,
That I have worshipp'd Love upon my knee
And almost fear'd it. I have trembled too,
In my much joy! A glove—a ribbon's hue—
Have moved me strangely; and in lonely hours,
In empty chambers, and in starlit bowers,
I have as 'twere enthroned a sainted Grief
And paid it homage. Have you found relief
In tears and dreams,—as I have done full oft,—
And not been proud or perjured, when, aloft,
A lark has seemed to trill the loved-one's name?
I pray you all, by Love's resistless flame,
Accept of me this tale which now is told.
For there's no shame in Truth; and Hope's a-cold
That has no dreams to feed it. . . .

Far away

There stood, in years gone by, athwart the spray
That dashed the sea-born crags, a lordly tower;
And, down the valley—offshoot of its dower—
A lowly cot embowered in such a nook
As lured Apollo when, with pipe and crook,
He wooed Acantha. And within its walls
A nymph was sheltered whom a Legend calls
Gladys the Singer—one of those elect
And fond fair women whom the world has decked
With Dead Sea laurels.

He who owned the land

Was young and rich and lavish of his hand,
And well he knew the bower, aye! as the kite
May know the dove-cot; and a-down the height

He strode one day, one lustrous autumn-day,
Brain-sick with fancies such as warp the sway
Of Eros' children ; and his steps he turned
To where the cottage stood amid the burned
And withering foliage. But, beside the same,
He paus'd in doubt ; and, with a kindling shame,
Half glad, half sad, he heard a matin song
Sung, as it seem'd, by One who did belong
To angel-choirs. And as he drain'd the draught
Of that sweet voice—as soul and body quaff'd
The nectarous notes—a something from his eyes
Fell like a film ; and all the earth and skies
And all the frondage of the forest way
Re-took the raptures of the month of May.
And in his thought he roamed beside the stream
Where she had led him—where the golden gleam
Of her bright hair had crown'd the tender grace
Of her lithe body—and her matchless face
Had made him mad ! For, vision-like, he stood
Alone with her in heaven, and found it good,—
Found it the one sweet thing of all things known,
To sit with her at twilight, all alone,
In halcyon spots—the universe their own.
A bowery nook, a sea-side lonely cave,
These were his Heaven, and more he did not crave !
But now he loitered near the very shrine
Of this lov'd soul, and heard her voice divine
Peal out supreme.—He open'd with a smile
The querulous door, and stood, a breathing-while,
Straight in her sight.

She rush'd into his arms
Tear-lit with joy, and glowing in the charms
Of white surrender ; “O my Love ! my Love !
So true, so gentle, so insured above

All time and distance ! I have yearn'd for thee
 As earth for summer, as the lonely sea
 For midnight stars ; and now thou'rt here at last,
 I mean to cling to thee, and hold thee fast,
 Aye ! as a chain might do, I mean to cling
 Fast round thy soul, and sphere thee like a ring.
 What ! not one word ? And gloomy, too, and chill,
 On this bright day ? O Roland ! thou art ill,
 And wilt not tell me ! Thou'rt convulsion-pale,
 And in thy gaze I read the dismal tale
 Of some foreboding. O my dearest one !
 My life, my death, my All beneath the sun !
 In God's good name I charge thee make it clear
 What makes thee sad ? And if thou need a tear
 Seek it in me,—for I have learnt the way
 To shed more tears than thou wilt need to-day."

"Nay, Gladys, nay !" with smiles he answered
 her,
 "'Tis much ; 'tis nothing ! Some unwonted stir
 In household matters.—Words are empty things;
 Why should they hurt ? If Faithfulness had wings
 'Twould quit me now ; 'tis here, and thou art She.
 Nay, sit thee down, and I will yield to thee
 My sure confession."

Gladys, with a look
 Half frown, half smile, obey'd him ; yet she shook
 As shakes an aspen when the winds are hush'd,
 And all the meadow-lands are sunset-flushed.
 And he ? Remorse was with him ; and apart
 He stood absorb'd. Should he consult his heart ?
 Or serve ambition ? He had won the soul
 Of this sweet woman, and to his control
 His words had sway'd her. Should he put to scorn
 The threats and frets and sneers which, all the morn,
 Had marr'd his peace ?—Aye ! should he, as a knight

In olden time had done for his delight,
 Accept, revere, enshrine, and re-endow
 This blue-eyed wonder with his marriage-vow?
 He still'd a sigh, and turn'd to her, and spake :—
 "Thou know'st, O Gladys ! for thine honour's sake,
 And for thyself that art as Heaven to me,
 I would not break the oath which unto thee
 My lips have sworn. But I, too long I fear,
 Have stood between thy life and that career
 Which waits for thee,—as Silence in the dales
 Waits, after dark, for songs of nightingales !
 I should have warn'd thee. In my heart I knew
 That tedious hours, and sorrows, not a few,
 Would be thy meed, if here thou didst prolong
 Thy tell-tale absence from the world of song."

She heard abash'd. Was he indeed possess'd
 Of foregone knowledge, though so late confess'd?
 Or was he wearied of their sylvan bliss?
 She mused an instant in the fear of this ;
 And then, without a sign, she droop'd her head
 And wept outright,—such tears as children shed
 When, 'mid a storm, they hear their parents pray.

Women are stronger than we care to say,
 And when they weep they conquer more than men
 With sword or sceptre ; and they bind us then
 With weak, warm hands, as with a festal wreath.
 Let those who draw the sword from out its sheath,
 And those who sit and stare on gilded thrones,
 Beware of Woman ! She, in all the zones
 And all the courts of earth, and all its bowers,
 Is queen elect of all the golden hours.
 She is the ruler whom the rulers know,
 And when she wills a thing, in joy or woe,
 In health or sickness, or remorse or sin,
 The high-born Knight must bow to her therein.

'Twas so to-day when, with a mute caress,
She spake her trust, and clothed in courtliness,
Made known her fears;—and this with such a mien,
And such sweet fervour, and so bright a sheen
Of pout and blush, that, for a moment's space,
He gazed, relenting, on her radiant face,
And loath'd himself; and trembled at her glance,
And vow'd to God that his was evil chance
To do this thing, and in his very shame
To fear to name it, though in Honour's name.

He eyed her face, the brighter for the rush
Of those quick tears; and kiss'd away the blush
That warm'd her cheek as with a rose's stain,
And then re-kiss'd it to its place again,
So weak she seem'd, and yet so strong withal,
And so exacting, that, within her thrall,
Man as he was, he felt the force in him
Melt into misery, and a tear bedim
His traitorous gaze; for he was one of those
Who fear the scoffs of beauty more than blows.
But she could mark the menace and the drift,
Of thoughts unuttered, and her soul could sift
Sound from the sense thereof; and thus she spake:
"O Roland! O my master! for thy sake
I have been stabb'd by doubts and lain awake
Night after night, to dream of wayward things,—
A moth's lament, a flower with folded wings,
An April daisy turn'd into a screen
For elfin lovers, and the face serene
Of my dead sister, who, though like to me
As flakes of snow are like the foam at sea,
Would thrust me back, full soon, could she behold
My fall'n estate, and all my promise-gold
Turn'd into dust,—I mean the pride I had
In mine own self, ere doting made me mad.

Ah, gracious God ! how glad were I to pass
Young as I am, beneath the churchyard grass,
If, but an instant ere I went that way,
I might re-win the right I had to pray ! ”

But he, soft-smiling, gazed on her, and stood
Silent apace, as one, within a wood,
Haunted by pixies at the swooning-hour
Of birds and bushes, when the moon has power.
Aye ! as a man entranced when night is done,
May note the world's betrothal to the sun,
E'en so he watch'd her, with a pent up-sigh,
And thus addressed her :—“ Thou'rt too young to
die,

And much too fair. Who knows it more than thou ?
Nay, hear me, Gladys ? for I lie not now,
Nor have I lied to thee at any time,
Or wrong'd in thought the holy wedding chime,
Or spurn'd an oath, or fear'd a promise-ring.
No ! I have thought no lie, nor would I bring
Sorrow to thee or shame, or make thee rue
The rapt confession of thine eyes of blue,
When first I saw thee in the Long-Ago
Of last year's May,—as blameless as the snow
Which makes its eyrie on the mountain's crest.
Beauty is thine, and Music, and the quest
For power and wealth, and all the joys of fame,
And all the rhapsodies that round a name
Burst into splendour to possess a world !
Glory is thine, and, on thy lips impearl'd,
A smile so sweet, so lustrous in its mirth,
That none hath known, till now, upon the earth,
A dream so true, a joy so fair to see.”

“ A dream,—a joy ? Ah, thou canst flatter me ! ”
She rippled forth in answer to this speech,
But I am here, to hide me, out of reach,

If thou upbraid me—as I know thou wilt—
For too much trust,—itself a kind of guilt.
Am I attaint, or guiltless in thy sight,
For my day-dreams ? ”

He answered her aright :—

“ I am not worthy of so proud a boon
As thy great love ; for not the sun and moon,
And not the stars, in all their course, have known
Such gem-like joy ; and I would fain atone,
If thou permit me, by a prompt assent
To all thy dreams for Art’s aggrandisement ;
Aye ! have thee robed, and see thee crown’d again,
As Music’s Queen,—return’d to her domain.”

“ Music’s domain ? ” she cried. “ Nay, that is
done.

But lo ! I love thee as a kneeling nun
Loves, in the circuit of her little cell,
The pictured face of Christ who conquered Hell.
E’en so I love thee, Sweetheart ! and I swear,
By God’s own mouth, and by His auburn hair,
That I will slay thee if thou’rt false to me ! ”
This said, she flush’d as red as roses be
And sprang to him, and quavered in her voice.
“ O Love ! ” she cried, “ O Roland ! O my Choice !
Sorrow be mine, not thine, if I offend.
It seems I vex thee. Shall I make an end,
Here, in this place, with this thy jewell’d knife,
At once of loving and of loveless life ?
Winter is wild. The storm may want a wife.
And I am friendless as a foundering ship !
The hours recoil ; the monstrous moments slip
Fast through my fingers, while I count the beads
Of my poor life,—the rosary of my deeds
Good, bad, and selfish, and the joy therein
Which oft I found, undaunted by the sin—

If sin it be—which brought me to thy side.
 I lov'd thee, Roland ! as, at eventide,
 The lowly daisy, in her hood of green,
 Loves the set sun,—and keeps her face unseen
 Through all the drowsy hours of sainted night,
 Till dawn restores the Lov'd One to her sight.
 Oh ! I can drown, or, like a broken lyre,
 Be thrown to earth, or cast upon a fire.
 I can be made to feel the pangs of death,
 And yet be constant to the quest of breath,—
 Our poor, pale trick of living through the lies
 We name Existence, when that 'something' dies
 Which we call Honour. Many and many a way
 Can I be struck, or fretted, night and day,
 In some new fashion, or condemn'd the while
 To take for food the semblance of a smile,
 The left-off rapture of a slain caress,
 And 'Yes' for 'No,' and 'No' perchance for 'Yes.'
 Ah ! well I see, of comfort there is none,
 And no completion of the faith begun,
 When moon and star, and swift-ascending sun,
 Brought joy to me, and made me, as I wis,
 The thing I am, soul-famish'd for a kiss."

He rais'd her hand, and kiss'd it, as a king,
 For some cold vow, may do so staid a thing.
 But as he kiss'd her,—careful as the snow
 Which falls on flowers,—she frown'd, and murmur'd
 low :—

"Too kind,—good Sir !" and dashed away a tear
 And waved him back, as heedful to appear
 Nor grave nor gay, nor bashful in her mind ;
 And, far away, the wailing autumn wind
 Sobb'd o'er the sea, alone and unconfined,
 Like some poor lover whom the nights and days
 Have robb'd alike of triumph and of praise.

“O friend!” he answer’d, “I am much to blame.
 I taught thee this ; I taught thee how to name
 Sorrow and sin and suffering ; and for thee
 I brought myself to sue, aye ! on my knee
 To my proud sire. O Gladys ! wouldst thou guess
 His rude retort, his smile of bitterness ?
 He curs’d thee, Gladys ! ”

With a frown she drew
 A quick, hot breath, and look’d him through and
 through,

And then replied :—“I gave thee all I had,—
 My youth, my truth, my life, and all things glad,
 All thoughts of love, all hopes of peace to come,
 And only kept away my sorrows’ sum,—
 My tears, and fears, and sighs, and all the shame
 That burnt the bays of what I deem’d my fame.
 If still remember’d in the world of men,
 If honour’d still beyond this desert-glen
 Where now we’ve met, I care not. I am dead
 To all delights with which my soul I fed,
 And all ambitions in the realm of art,
 And all the fond desires that were a part
 Of my young life, before I came to thee.”

“What need,” he answer’d, “here beside the sea,
 Where Art and Nature have the world for friend,
 What need, my Love ! of tears that come to end
 Full soon for lovers,—and for women first ?
 What need hast thou for rancour, or for thirst
 Of things withheld unkindly—who shall say !—
 Or hid from sight, or haply kept away
 For some good purpose ? ” And he bent his head
 And moved his lips, and, with a word unsaid,
 Look’d at her straight.

“O God ! ” she stammer’d out,
 “Can such things be ? Nay, Sir, beyond a doubt,

You men are just ; but, by your tardy leave,
We women, too, may learn, while we deceive,
To preach like you !—'Twas Adam tempted Eve !
He bade her eat. He tempted her to fall,
And then denounced her ! ” And, with this recall
Of her past life, she lifted up her face,
As one who sees a snake a-near the place
She thought secure ; and flash'd a proud disdain
On his mute wonder and the look of pain
With which he eyed her ; and she spake again :—
“ Men have their rights, I know, and thou hast thine,
To break the bowl, and squander all the wine !
But tell me, quick, thy father's final word,
And what, in shame, to-day thine ears have heard ? ”

His faltering lips made answer to her quest :—

“ He was unjust, and stern, and ill at rest,
But clear, emphatic, certain of his power.

‘Thou must dismiss,’ he said, ‘this very hour,
All thoughts of love till I permit the same.’

And, with a cold aspersion on thy fame,

He wrung my heart with words I will not name.”

Sudden as fire she started to her feet :

“And thou?” she cried, “Thine answer to the heat
Of this distemper?” Like a craven man

He hung his head, and blush'd as he began

Some stuttering words. “I am controll'd,” he said,

“By claims of kindred, which the quick and dead

Alike have bow'd to. For my father's sake,

For mine and his, I must at once partake

Of his fell purpose, and restore thy troth,

And claim of thee mine own mistaken oath.

This, and no less.”

“No less?” she swift replied.

“This,—and no less? Well, well, I must have died
Some time to-day! I must have met my death

Some minutes since, or, with thy cruel breath,
 Thou hadst not dared,—in presence of my corse,—
 To rack my soul with word of this divorce.
 But leave me quickly, for the dead are proud,
 And murder'd oaths are safest in a shroud !
 I hate thee, Roland ! and my hate is such
 I would not soil my finger with a touch
 Of thy white body, though to touch it now
 Made me an Empress. O thou traitor, thou !
 'Traitor to me and mine.—if mine there be
 In days hereafter,—O thou sad-to-see,
 And dark and dread pale spectre of the thing
 I lov'd and fear'd and revered as a king !
 Nay, I have eyes. I see thee. I can trace
 The coward blush that lurks about thy face,
 And fears its colour,—fears to show itself,
 Lest it should wear the livid look of pelf,
 Or mark thy cheek with some detested blot.
 I know thy purpose, though thou tell it not :—
 To wed hereafter, for Ambition's sake,
 A high-born dame with gold enough to slake
 Thy thirst of power."

He made a quick retort :

"No bride for me, in good or ill report,—
 In all the round of all my nights and days."
 But with a withering look she met his gaze,
 As she would stab him with that very knife
 Whereof she spake, ere yet a word of strife
 Had sprung between them ; and she raised her head
 And flash'd contempt. "Thou art some serf," she said,
 "Stol'n in the night from some marauder's shed,
 And made to take the place,—a place belied,—
 Of son and heir,—a castle's foolish pride !
 But One who knows all things beneath the sun
 Hath frowned on thee, and sees what thou hast done ;

And all thy heart is bared to Him to-day,
And all thou say'st,—and all thou still wouldst say.”

She paus'd an instant with a weary thought
That he might scatter all her doubts to nought,—
All her distress, and all the throbs of pain
That work'd within her ; and she spake again :—
“ O thou dried soul whom long I deem'd a man,
Monarch of men, and mine for all the span
Of our two lives, in this world and the next,
O thou weak boaster of a brainless text,
Fitter to fill a trench than be the curse
Of one more summer, or to move me worse
Than now thou mov'st me ! Nay, I hate thee not.
Who hates the worm ? Who hates the canker-blot
On some poor tree ? I see thee as thou art.
I sound thy depths. I read thee to the heart.
I find thee shallow as a clamorous rill
That wends its way, uncall'd for, down a hill ! ”

As thus she spake, his face from white to red,
And red to white, as of a man half dead,
Grew famine-featured while he look'd at her,
And own'd the mastery, and the fitful spur
Of her wild anger ; and was nigh to sue
For absolution, as his passion-due.
But, like a standard-pole whose flag is down,
Or like the base usurper of a crown,
He stood erect, and, clothed in his deceit,
Eyed her aghast, as one who would retreat
In some sleek way, if, ere proceeding thence,
He might be pardoned for his love's offence.

“ One word ! ” she answer'd to his mute appeal,
“ One further word ! ” And then, as she would reel,
Or swoon, or die, or do some deadly thing,
She clutch'd the air, as men at sea may cling,
Wreck'd as they are, to some discarded rope.

She ached towards him with a kind of hope,
And then dismiss'd it, and in accents weak,
And tears held back, continued thus to speak :—

“Thou knows t all women well,—thou oft hast sa'id !
Thou know'st not *me*. Go, know thyself instead,—
What man thou art, how false and how unjust
To Nature's test, and Knighthood's holy trust.
I lov'd thee not ! I lov'd a foolish dream
That look'd like thee. I saw thee in the gleam
Of some bright thought, and deem'd thee such an one.
As minstrels sing of, when they drape the sun,
And make him Man, and crown him with a crown !
Thou wast the flower of all the world's renown
In my glad sight ; but now, to see thee there,
I seem to see the wraith of some despair,—
A thing so rude, so robber-like in plan,
I would not have thee for my serving-man !
Aye, aye, 'tis so !—I swear by God's delight
When with His hand He parted day and night,
And by the stars, and by the saints of heaven,
That I repent me of my girlhood given
To thy rude touch ! All evil thee beset,
Thou blight of morning ! All remorse and shame
Possess thy soul, and sap the ancient fame
Of thy great house ! I was too frail a thing,
Too quickly won—too impotent to sting—
A fair-hair'd frailty with attractive eyes,—
A doll,—a puppet,—something from the skies
For thy caressing, and belike in time
For thy denouncing, as a minute's crime
Done up in silk ! But should'st thou, for thy peace,—
If peace it be,—should'st thou, ere autumn cease,
Require a toy, a heart to play withal,
An unwed wife to answer to thy call,—
Say I was proud, and spurn'd thee from my side ;

Say that the love between us snapp'd and died,
 As dies a tune, as snaps the strained chord
 Of some wild harp,—too weak to be restored.
 Nay ! say this, too : I claim no part in thee,
 For I would liefer trust a wave at sea,
 A pent-up fire, a raging famish'd bear,
 Than thy false heart !—I lov'd thy raven hair ;
 I hate it now. I lov'd thy hand so white,
 Thy face, thy form,—thy flattery, day and night,—
 And thy dark eyes and alabaster brow ;
 Be God my witness how I hate them now ! ”

He stood transfix'd ; he quiver'd as he heard.
 He made as he would speak some ruffian word,
 Some word uncased by torture from his soul,
 Beyond the boundaries of his blood's control.
 But with a groan he conquered this intent,
 And smiled on her, as some reflex is sent
 From westward skies, at waning of the day,
 When winds of winter spurn the clouds away.
 “ Let us be friends,” he urged, with lifted head,
 “ For Love's sweet sake, for Love that was not dead
 That night in June !—for Love that lured us on
 To deeds that wreck'd us on the shores of dawn !
 E'en for that love, I say, be generous now,
 And grant some liking, though the Fates allow
 Small time for rapture. Say ! shall this be done,
 And we forget the dream that made us One ? ”
 “ Hence ! Quit my sight ! ” she cried, as with her hand
 She waved him back—white-heated, fair and grand,
 As some sweet lady whom a clown has vex'd—
 “ Away,—thou boor ! ”

One moment, and the next,
 He stood full-height ; and then, with half a stare,
 And half a scowl, out-saunter'd in the air.
 “ She must be mad,” he thought ; and, slow, retraced

His measured steps, athwart the shingly waste.
But she leapt foward, like a stricken deer,
With one great cry, brow-beaten in her fear,
And yet transform'd to something half divine.
For Love had torn the darkness for a sign,
And, sharp within her soul, a something stirr'd
Like wounded wings of some imprison'd bird.

"Come back! Come back!" she cried, and open
flung

The near-shut window, where the roses hung
In their torn wreaths, "Come back and learn from me
What no man knows,—what haply unto thee
May bring content." But, shuddering tamely there,
The wild cry fell; and through her gold-like hair
Her face look'd out, as, on a winter's night,
The icy moon looks down through vapours white.
"Come back!" she cried to that retreating form
Which heard her not; and weird, and wan, and warm,
She craned her neck to note the path he took,
And sway'd herself, as sways beside a brook
A lonely willow on a breathless day;
And with her lips she made as she would say:—
"I was thy faithful wife, though wed in sport,
As wives were wedded once in Arthur's court.
Yet heed my plea! Two hearts are knit in one
In my poor frame."

But utterance found she none;
And, ere ecstatic she could shape the words,
And waft them forth as Summer wafts the birds,
For joy, for memory, or for grief's control,
Her face convuls'd and o'er her tottering soul
The storm-cloud burst; and tears shut out the light.

And so it came to pass, in her despite,
That he ignored the secret, sad but sweet,
Wherewith she ached at every pulse's beat.

And, later on, the breezes told the flowers
How One who must have wept for many hours
Fled through the wood. It was some sprite,—they
said,—

A nymph, a naiad,—One who, as she fled,
O'er-ruled her grief, and watch'd, with aching sight,
The blood-red moon go down into the night.

CANTO SECOND.

AGAIN the spring-time with its songs of love
Had come and gone ; again the cooing dove
Had called its nestling on the sheenful breeze ;
Again the waves of the careering seas
Had storm'd the coast with shouts of loud acclaim,
What time the winter-wind, in ocean's name,
Hurled out defiance ; and the queen of heaven,
The maiden-moon, entranced or in a sweven,
Had paced the sky, from autumn unto spring,
Unclaim'd of men, uncrown'd of any king,
And only lov'd aright by loveless maids.
And once again the rapture of the glades,—
The rout and revel of the spring-decades,—
Had fill'd and thrill'd the air with such delight
As makes a tourney of the day and night
When gale confronts with gale at equinox,
And all the cliffs, and all the seaward rocks
Have thuds of joy ! Again the forest yearn'd
For sight of summer, and the roses burn'd
On many a hedge, whereon the mounting sun
Put forth his trophies. For the world had won
Full right to cling thereto, as golden-fleeced,
The rapt Hyperion leapt from out the East.
Earth and the sky had call'd him ; and the land
Had smiled, expectant ; and the ocean-strand

Had bared her bosom to the sun's caress :
And wind and wave had counted tress on tress
Of his long hair, and made a chant thereof
Warm, aye ! and wanton as the songs of love
Which sibyls sing. And soft the breezes crept
From rock to rock, where over-night had slept
A white sea-fog, and where, in summer days,
The blue hare-bell would sound the Maker's praise
In chimes unheard by pedants, but aright
Guessed-at by bards.—The hill was all alight
With blazing furze, that keeps the sun in sight,
And seems to thrill with sunshine after dark ;
And, far away, the lilting of the lark,
The prophet-bird, the singer of the dawn,
Invested Heaven, as if its mate had gone
Straight through the sky, and must be ravish'd back.

And lo ! dishevell'd on the upland track,
A weary woman with a load of joy :—
A Phœban gift—a bright-eyed baby-boy,
With clustering curls ! And she who bore the child
Was fair and comely, though with something wild
In her blue eyes, and something in her gait
That spoke of watchfulness endured of late,
As if the ghost of terror had pursued
Her faltering steps, and agony, at feud
With fairer things, and sapp'd within her mind
The girlish thoughts that link'd her to her kind.

“ Here let us rest,” she cried, as on a knoll
She bent her down, “ and I will ease my soul
Of half its weight, and ease my body, too,
Of its fond burden. For I tell thee true,
Mine own sweet babe ! that, in this heart of mine,
Are tears unnumber'd, sharper than the brine
Of salt sea-winds, and fiercer than the flames
Of twenty fires ; and there are fitful names,—

If I could find them,—for my many blames.
Dost see, my Roland ! yonder on the ridge,
This side the forest, near the broken bridge,
That princely tower ? The keys thereof are ours,—
If we demand them,—all the roofs and towers,
Yea, all the landscape, all the shining land,
All ours for ever, if we lift a hand.

But shall we lift it ? Shall we make appeal
To one who hates us—one who will not kneel
For God's high quittance—and beyond his pelf,
Hath nought to love, or pray for, but himself ?”

While thus she parley'd with the tender elf
Who call'd her “ Mother,” and was all she had,
This side eternity, to keep her glad,
Shudders oppress'd her, and there came a sound
Of leaves and twigs in ear-shot of the mound
Where she was throned. And lo ! towards her came
A faggot-woman, old and cold and lame,
Who seem'd the ghost of some dead winter's day
Return'd to life, to lead the world astray,
And mar good thoughts.

The beldam looked at her.
And snarled, aggressive, as a famished cur
Which no man loves. “ Wilt do a deed for me,”
The girl inquired, “ and earn a golden fee
This happy morn ? I see thou wilt do this ;
For thou art pleased, as when a dream of bliss
Comes to a child. Aye ! aye ! the world is sad.
I know 'tis so ! But gold will make thee glad.”
With this she tore a leaflet from a book,
And wrote as follows, while her bosom shook
With fears untold :—

“ If thou remember now
A dream long dead,—a broken, foolish vow,—
A poor, pale ghost who, in the years gone by,

Was known as Gladys,—quit thy turret high,
 And seek, this day, the place thou knowest well :
 The Witches' Cave, the ante-room of Hell,—
 If Heaven and Hell be one thing and the same,
 And hope a snare, and misery but a name !
 I have a lustrous jewel here with me
 Which bears thy mark ; a thing so fair to see
 That many a man of pride would sell for this
 All things he hath, and all his chance of bliss
 In worlds far off. But yet, oh ! read me right,
 And heed me well. This is no fool's delight,
 And no poor treasure from the marts of men,
 That now I speak of ; for a poet's pen,
 A painter's brush, a sculptor's art divine,
 Alone were fit to vaunt this gem of mine.
 A rapturous burst of music at a shrine
 Might make it clear, and earth would understand !
 But I must place it in a surer hand
 Than this I write with ; and I pray thee now,
 If thou remember still a midnight vow
 Which once was thine—which God and I alone
 Heard thee pronounce, albeit in under-tone—
 Come with the dame ; but come as comes a man
 Who clears a path for Cæsar in the van
 Of utmost truth."

Herewith she tied the scrip,
 And kiss'd it fondly, with revering lip,
 As one, in prayer, may kiss a holy thing,—
 And therewithal she smiled as dryad Spring
 May smile on Winter when the months are young,
 And re-addressed, with her persuading tongue,
 That aged dame :—"Go, take with thee, I pray,
 This scroll I give thee, and in haste convey
 To yonder tower. Its master knows I'm here,
 And he will come to where the sea-weed sere

Thrills to the blast, and hisses to the sea :—
But make no further talk of mine or me,
Save this alone :—Thou'st seen me on my way
To find a cavern where, from day to day,
Strange things were plann'd. He knows what I
would say !

Hence, then, and quickly ; and return with him."

The ancient woman, cold in every limb
And twitch'd by palsy, with a feeble laugh,
Made mouths at her, and fumbling with her staff,
Did name high God ! The world's a-full of such :—
Women and men, unseemly to the touch,
Unkempt, uncanny, girt about with woe,
And smirch'd with mud, who yet are proud to know
Some far-off Duke, who threats them with a rod
And claims their toil. E'en so she talk'd of God !

But when she'd gone, that other caught the boy
Quick in her arms, as one may catch a toy,
And call'd it " King," and " Sweetheart," and enlaced
Her fair, fond arms around him, tender-faced ;
And he, whose eyes in rapture seem'd to float,
Caught at the chain that pended from her throat,
And played therewith, and seiz'd, and open'd wide,
A golden trinket, where a face of pride
Look'd out in smiles, as faces in a dream
Invest the darkness and absorb the beam
Of some set sun ; and thus that woman fair
Resumed her talk, and covered with her hair
The baby-face which look'd into her own :—
" He is thy father, child ! though all unknown,
Thine unkind father who, in summers flown,
Made me his plaything ! Oh, he'll make thee great,
And treat thee as a lord of high estate !
There ! weep not, Sweet ! My tears are foolish ones.
All hopes are sound ; all fathers love their sons,

And thine will love thee when he comes to-day
And scans thy face, and mine so far away ! ”

These latter words she spoke beneath her breath,
And as she paus'd a pallor, like to death,
Came o'er her cheek. There seem'd to surge to her
The far-off sound of some sea-sepulchre,
The thud of waters, and the thrill of tides
In lonely haunts, where Ocean over-rides
Her ghastly wrecks.

She swoon'd into herself,
With eyes out-staring to a broken shelf
Of piled-up cloud, on which the sun had smiled ;
And then, with feverous haste, she snatched the child
Forth from its couch among the flow'rets fair,
And bore it seaward, and was quickly there
In that same nook whereof she wrote the name—
The Witches' Cave—the landmark of a shame
She lov'd more dearly now the worst was known
Than halcyon bards, or kings upon a throne
Love their dominions ; and within the niche,
All poor with weeds, she placed the jewel rich
Whereof she spake.

The child into a trance
Of loveliest sleep had fall'n ; and now, askance
She gazed upon it, as she wrapp'd it round
In her red scarf, and laid a packet bound
With golden thread beside it ; and, with tears,
Kiss'd it in silence—lest the dimpled fears,
There hush'd in slumber, should awake to pry
And thwart her purpose.

Ah ! 'twere sweet to die,
To save from drowning, or to snatch from fire
This life-long treasure ; but, in penance dire,
To leave it thus ! To thrust it on its sire,
And then to shun it ? And for what ? A dream,—

A chance,—a hope,—a certitude,—a beam
Of far-off light ! “ He will be poor,” she thought,
“ If I live on ; but rich, and richly taught,
And fondly cared for, if I die for him.
So let me fare, O God ! where none may dim
Dead people’s eyes, and let Thy will be will’d,
E’en as the tempest in the night was still’d
At Thy Son’s coming ! ” And she bow’d her head,
And wept afresh, as weeps, when day is dead,
A sunset cloud ; and, shuddering and abyss’d
In her own soul, re-touch’d the child and kiss’d,
With desolate dull moaning of wild pain ;
And, like a woman with the curse of Cain
Full in her heart, out-leapt into the sun
And sought the ocean.

All her hair undone,
And pale and proud, with bosom-folded hands,
She stood in water on the woeful sands ;
And, ankle-deep, survey’d the glittering sea,
What time the wind uprose upon the lea.
“ O God ! ” she murmur’d, as she waded in,
“ Take Thou my soul ; absolve me of my sin,
And make me fit to join, when I am gone,
The ranks of those who wait, unfrown’d upon,
In deathful shades, in hope to reconcile
Their clamorous past with Thine eternal smile ! ”

She turned her face to shoreward, and awhile
Shed tears that scathed her, as they struggled through
Their eyelids’ fringe ; and, for a space or two,
Paused there inert. “ I will be brave,” she said,
And journey’d on, “ I will confront the dead,
In true-love fashion ! I will smile to-day,
And sing the songs of madness born in May,
The mirth of madness when the world was young,
And flower and field and ford had found a tongue ;

And each created thing had tuned its voice
To praise its Maker. For I die by choice.
I go to meet the ghosts of my despairs.
My murder'd hopes, my unregarded cares !
No man has wrought my death !—no woman's guile
Has sear'd my soul."

Then, with a kind of smile,
That twitch'd her mouth, and sadden'd all her face,
She sang the song of Death's abiding-place, —
A song of sorrow which, in days gone by,
Her lute had thrill'd to,—sigh with cadence-sigh
New knit in chorus. But to-day the sea,
The wind-struck sea, made all its chords agree
With that one rapture ; and the sounds thereof
Were sad to hear as sighs that speak of love.

SONG.

I.

THERE is a land beyond the rising moon,
A land of glory which the angels know ;—
A floating wonder like a dream of June,
The joys whereof will greet me in my swoon.

II.

A white sea-bird, a sea-gull overhead,
May chirp at me to twit me with a doubt,
But I shall smile upon my foamful bed,
And all the waves will know that I am dead.

III.

The sun, all day, will see me where I go,
And, one by one, the stars will peep at me,
And I shall soon be whitened like the snow,
Though weird and wild with wandering to and fro.

By this the water, bubbling to her knees,
Broke into ripples, which the venturous breeze
Edged as with lace—so dainty was the foam.
A wintry wind had comb'd it like a comb ;
But this light breeze, careering o'er the spray,
Turn'd it to silver 'mid the crooning lay
Of that lone creature on her foam-ward way.

SONG.

I.

O LOVE, my Master, O my Chosen One,
O thou to whom my thoughts, to-day, are turn'd !
I stand out here with all my cravings done,
And all my fevers quench'd beneath the sun.

II.

I am not mad ; nor am I—as I seem—
The ghost of gladness, or the bane thereof.
I hear the shouts of men, as in a dream,
And, far away, the sea-bird's sudden scream.

III.

I am the wicked rose that lov'd the Dark,
And lost its color, aye ! its blushing power,
And therewithal its kinship to the lark !
I am the night-wind's, and I bear its mark.

But now the water—clamoring to the ends
Of her long hair—appear'd to make amends
For its late calm ; and lashed her on the side.
It was the buffet of the clamorous tide,
The full tide, ebbing now, that sought the sea,
As late the beach was sought—a moment's glee
Whipp'd into foam ! But, unaffray'd at this,
She smiled and said :—" It was an ocean-kiss ;
This, and no more." And, with an aching heart,
She sang—with rapture that was once a part
Of her stage life by men remembered well—
The silvery cadence of her ocean-knell.

SONG.

I.

O SWEET my Son ! my darling ! dead to me,
But saved for him, as flowers are saved for God ;
How like a fête-day will thy finding be
When I'm at rest out yonder in the sea.

II.

Thou art the one sweet thing on all the earth,
The pride of summer, and the winter's balm ;
A glimpse of Heaven, a glory from thy birth,
Without a peer in sadness or in mirth.

III.

Had I a thousand lives instead of one,
A thousand deaths to die to cancel thine,
I'd give them all, aye ! freely as a nun
Gives all she hath for great Jehovah's Son.

And, fever-fraught, with wildly streaming hair,
She flung these notes ecstatic through the air.

SONG.

I.

THIS is the end of all my many fears.
 And this the charter of my right to die—
 To seek a solace, out beyond the spheres,
 And kill the scandals of my twenty years.

II.

This is my penance, this ! and my delight,
 To sail the deep for searching of a tomb—
 And through the mirk, the madness of the night ! . .

.

Up to the waist she stood in that expanse
 Of wan sea-water, piteous in her glance,
 And weary-limb'd, and shuddering to the soul.
 For, far away, she eyed the ocean-goal
 Whereto she thirsted with so wan a lip—
 The straight sea-line whereto a fleecy ship
 E'en now made way with homeward-sailing men ;
 And all the blood within her falter'd then.
 "Shall I go back," she thought, "and claim my boy,
 And dare the worst of all the world's annoy—
 And front his father, and confide in him?
 Shall I do this and turn me from the rim
 Of this dark wave now bearing full on me,
 And seek a dwelling far from any sea—
 Unknown to him?"

She stagger'd from the wave
 That reel'd about her like a rolling grave,
 And swerv'd aside to give it passage clear.
 "O God !" she mused, half palsied in her fear,

“I have o’erstepped my doom; and now for this
I shall be tumbled in the seething hiss
Of tides tumultuous, and a Nothing be,
A wide-eyed Nothing on the doubtful sea!”

Therewith she met the breakers’ dark advance
Which seem’d to tilt and turn to her, askance.
And one of these assail’d her with the shocks
Of foam-fed wrath, and hurl’d her at the rocks,
And dragg’d her down, low-gurgling in the strain
Of imminent death, and roar’d at her amain;
And made more havoc of her shining hair
Than lovers’ hands which murder while they spare:
Wild, wanton hands of wooers like the one
For whom, to-day, she died beneath the sun,
In fierce enthrallment. But she rose anew
Prone on her back, aghast, and pale of hue,
And out to sea—a lifeless thing, and mild,
With oozing lips, and eyes that ever smiled—
She slowly drifted—soon to face the stars,
And soon to front the moon athwart the bars
Of feathery cloud and opal-tinted mist.
But nevermore on earth should she be kiss’d,
And never more be seen in any lands,
And never more be touch’d by baby-hands!

Meantime the child, abandoned in the cave
Lay lock’d in slumber, spared by wind and wave,
And snugly-housed as eaglets in the bliss
Of their nest-thrall, though near a precipice,
Or rock-suspended in an Alpine wood.
And lo! at entrance of the cave there stood
A silent man, with white and wistful face,
Who seem’d to know the secrets of the place
And all the hopes which lit it, lantern-wise.

He paused an instant, and, with eager eyes,
Peer’d in the grot, but saw no woman there,

Only the child, which gave him stare for stare,
And clench'd its fist, new-waken'd out of sleep ;
And, as he enter'd, he was like to weep,
With thoughts contentious.

He undid the scroll,
And read these words : “O Roland ! O my soul !
Lord of my life, my Liege, my King of Men !
If thou be he who met me in the glen,
And not a dream, a phantom, or a fiend,
Accept of me this boy that I have screen'd
From birth till now, and take him to thyself,
And love him as a Ghibelline, or Guelf,
May love his heir. Our Saviour said, of old,
“Forbid them not !” and took into His fold
All tender babes, and bless'd them with His steven,
And call'd them God's elect, the lov'd of Heaven,
Whom none on all the earth should drive away
From His anointing, nightly or by day !
In life I err'd ; in death I make it clear
How much I lov'd thee—more than honor dear,
And more than wealth, which is the bane of youth,
When, canker-like, it makes a lie a truth,
And truth a lie, and hope a thing morose.
I am not brave ; and yet, if one so close
To Death's domain may dare to speak of Life,
I know not fear. I am the Ocean's wife.
I am the wife of every wanton wave
That cares to touch me, though it may not save.
Yet hear, oh, hear my plea ! My time will come.
This babe of ours will speak when I am dumb,
This baby-face will urge thee, with a smile,
To think of me, and pray for me the while,
As one enduring things that will endure.
And, O my love ! of this, at least be sure :—
I love thee still—for I will call thee mine

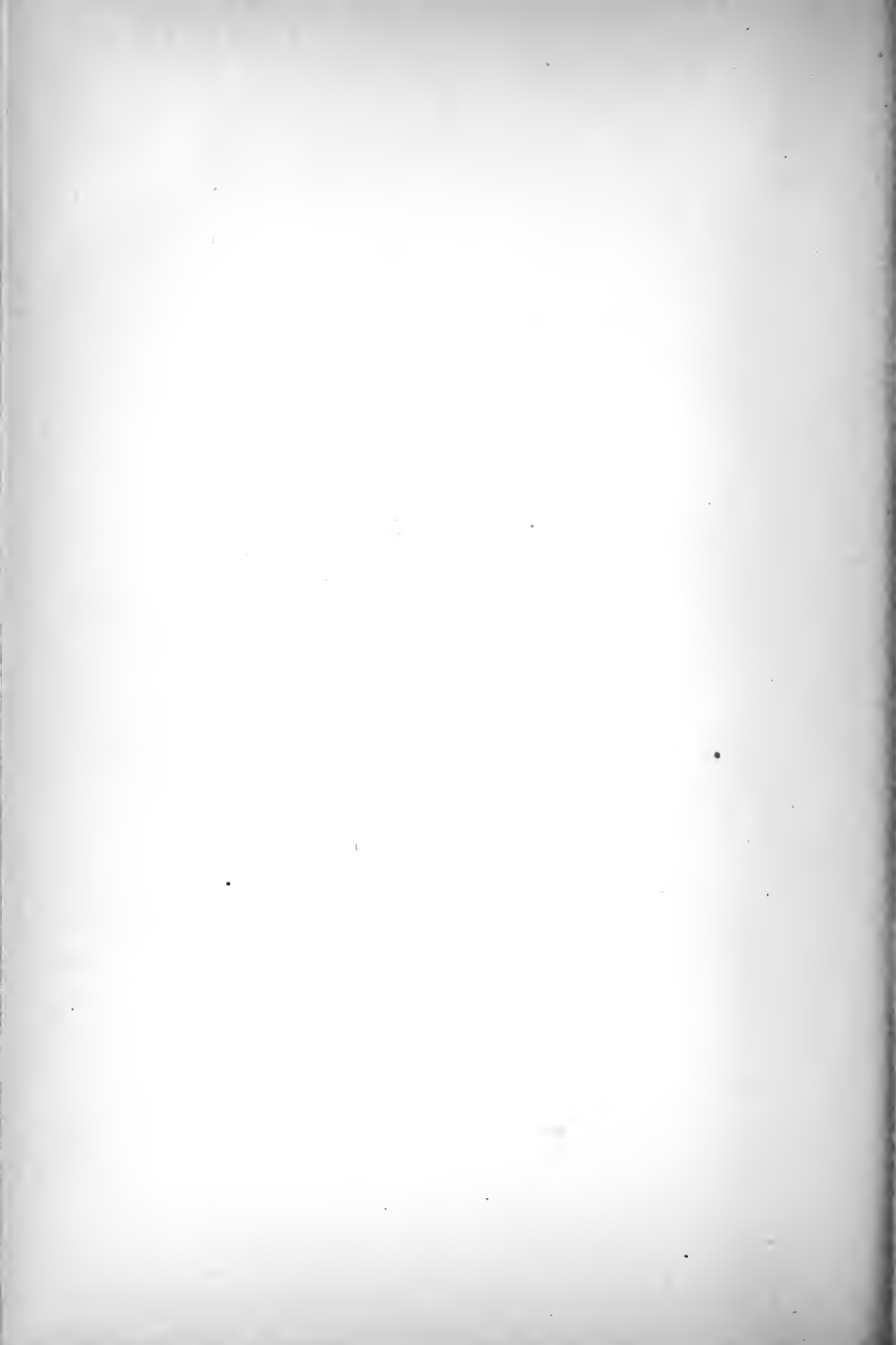
One moment more ! The place beyond the brine,
The place that I shall know when I am dead,
Will not affright me when my breath is sped.
And lo ! I ask thy pardon ere I die.
Meekly I crave it. For I made reply
In words unseemly ; and I pray thee now
Forget, forgive ! All wrongs I disallow ;
Yea, all my griefs, and all the blame thereof,
And all the pangs that seem'd to wait on love.
Oh, heed me, Roland ! Heed me, and, to-day
Let me be glad, and cast my doubts away,
As all unfit to share my dreams of thee.
And do thou pause ere thou condemn in me
The headlong fault which guides me. Is't a sin ?
If so, God help me ! Is't a fury-din
Of mere mad waves, and no assured repose
Beyond all these ? I know not ; for the shows
Of life and death and darkness touch me not,
As they did touch me ere I trod the spot
Of our first meeting. But I yearn at last
To this one hope—new-looming from the past—
That thou'lt remove all scandal from the boy,
When—by my death—I rid thee of annoy
Henceforth for ever ! He will win his peace
And thou thy comfort ; and, till summers cease,
And winters weary of their woful chase,
He will be thine. Oh ! when he grows apace
Let him be shown the picture of my face—
The face I wore when I was lov'd of thee—
And say I died, unhurt, beside the sea,
Not in the sea itself—'twould injure him
To know too much ! In cloisters cold and dim
Let laggards frown, but let the wise be gay !
I want my boy to laugh from day to day,
And smile at Fear, and torture not himself

With baleful thoughts. And yet, to bring him pelf,
I die unblest, unpray'd-for, in the flash
Of one wild moment ! If the deed be rash,
I do't in pity—not uncomfòtèd ;
For God, they say, protects when one is dead
One's only child ! And thou ? Forgive me, Dear !
And love my boy—when I'm no longer here.
Aye, tell him, Roland ! tell him that I died
A natural death,—and bless'd thee like a bride,
And call'd on God to guard thee evermore ! ”

A shuddering sob convuls'd him to the core
At these last words. “ My wife ! my winsome wife !
Mine and not mine ! My wife ! ” and then, at strife
With his own grief, he fell before the child,
And kissed and clasped him, and, in accents mild,
Call'd him his angel, his predestined one,
And bore him out triumphant to the sun,
And stilled his cries by clamoring to the blast :—
“ Come back ! Come back ! and turn'd a face aghast
To that old hag who croaked upon the sands.

And what the sequel of the love-demands
Of that lorn letter ? Day by day, for weeks,
The wifeless man, with sad and sunken cheeks,
Sail'd o'er the deep ; and sought, in silent bays,
And lonely creeks, the wooed and wish'd for gaze
Of stranded Gladys ; but he gain'd thereby
Naught but remorse, and shame that cannot die—
Shame and despair and blistering of the soul
Burnt through by tears—as though some burning coal
Had fallen therein ! He was the fool of time
And—like a man for whom in every chime
Outrings a knell—he quaff'd the wine of hope
And found it poison. All his thoughts did grope
In undug graves ; and, earthward and by sea,

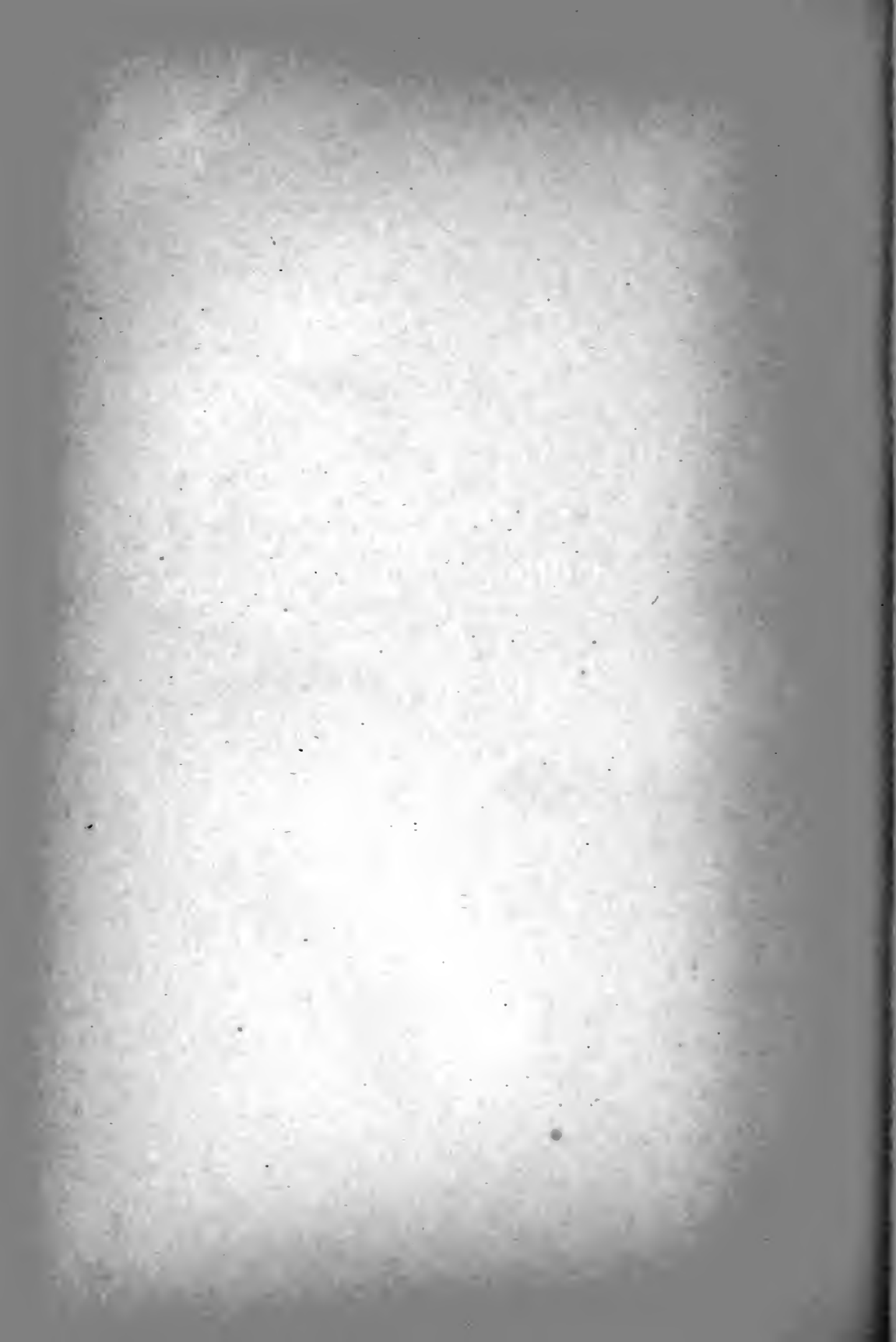
No man was found on foot, or on his knee,
At home—abroad—in sanctum or in pit
Of lowliest labour, so untimely knit
To thoughts of dole. And still the large-eyed corse
Veer'd out to sea, as blind as his remorse—
As deaf as danger, and as stiff and cold
As lopp'd-off limbs of trees upon the mould.
Yet she was hallow'd by the nights and days
Of heavenward calm, and redden'd by the rays
Of pitying suns, and look'd at, after dark,
By Lady Dian in her crescent-bark.
Aye ! she was cradled, for a week and more,
On Ocean's breast, and then, amid the roar
Of waves up-shuddering to the star-lit skies,
Torn down in wrack, where Silence underlies
All hopes and fears and frailties of the sod,
This side the sanctum of the joys of God !



A CHORAL ODE

TO

LIBERTY.



A CHORAL ODE TO LIBERTY.

I.

O SUNLIKE Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, man's Delight !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame
And none shall rob thee of thy vested right.
Where is the man, though fifty times a king,
Shall stay the tide, or countermand the spring ?
And where is he, though fifty times a knave,
Shall track thy steps to cast thee in a grave ?

II.

Old as the sun art thou, and young as morn,
And fresh as April when the breezes blow,
And girt with glory like the growing corn,
And undefiled like mountains made of snow.
Oh, thou'rt the summer of the souls of men,
And poor men's rights, approved by sword and pen,
Are made self-certain as the day at noon,
And fair to view as flowers that grow in June.

III.

Look, where erect and tall thy Symbol waits,*
The gift of France to friends beyond the deep,

* Bertoldi's Statue of Liberty in New York harbour.

A lofty presence at the ocean-gates
 With lips of peace and eyes that cannot weep ;
 A new-born Tellus with uplifted arm
 To light the seas, and keep the land from harm—
 To light the coast at downfall of the day,
 And dower with dawn the darkening water-way.

IV.

*O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
 Mother and maid, immortal, stern of vow!
 Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
 And thou shall wear the lightning on thy brow!*

V.

Who dares condemn thee with the puny breath
 Of one poor life, O thou untouched of Fate !
 Who seeks to lure thee to a felon's death,
 And thou so splendid and so love-elate ?
 Who dares do this and live ? Who dares assail
 Thy star-kissed forehead, pure and marble-pale ;
 And thou so self-possessed 'mid all the stir,
 And like to Pallas born of Mùlciber ?

VI.

Oh, I've beheld the sun, at setting time,
 Peep o'er the hills as if to say good-bye ;
 And I have hailed it with the sudden rhyme
 Of some new thought, full-freighted with a sigh.
 And I have mused :—E'en thus may Freedom fall,
 And darkness shroud it like a winter pall,
 And night o'erwhelm it, and the shades thereof
 Engulf the glories born of perfect love.

VII.

But there's no fall for thee ; there is no tomb ;
And none shall stab thee, none shall stay thy hand.
Thy face is fair with love's eternal bloom
And thou shalt have all things at thy command.
A tomb for thee? Aye, when the sun is slain
And lamps and fires make daylight on the plain,
Then may'st thou die, O Freedom ! and for thee
A tomb be found where fears and dangers be.

VIII.

*O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, keen of sight!
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt tread the tempest in the night!*

IX.

There shall be feasting and a sound of song
In thy great cities ; and a voice divine
Shall tell of freedom all the winter long,
And fill the air with rapture as with wine.
The spring shall hear it, spring shall hear the sound,
And summer waft it o'er the flowerful ground ;
And autumn pale shall shake her withered leaves
On festal morns and star-bespangled eves.

X.

For thou'rt the smile of Heaven when earth is dim—
The face of God reflected in the sea—
The land's acclaim uplifted by the hymn
Of some glad lark triumphant on the lea.

Thou art all this and more ! Thou art the goal
 Of earth's elected ones from pole to pole,
 The lute-string's voice, the world's primeval fire,
 And each man's hope, and every man's desire.

XI.

O proud and pure ! O gentle and sublime !
 For thee and thine, O Freedom ! O my Joy !
 For thee, Celestial ! on the shores of time
 A throne is built which no man shall destroy.
 Thou shalt be seen for miles and miles around
 And wield a sceptre, though of none be crowned.
 The waves shall know thee and the winds of Heaven
 Shall sing thee songs with mixed and mighty steven.

XII.

*O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
 Mother and maid, immortal, unconfined !
 Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
 And thou shall speed more swiftly than the wind !*

XIII.

Who loves thee not is traitor to himself,
 Traitor is he to God and to the grave,
 Poor as a miser with his load of pelf,
 And more unstable than a lee-ward wave.
 Cursèd is he for aye, and his shall be
 A name of shame from sea to furthest sea,
 A name of scorn to all men under sun
 Whose upright souls have learnt to loath this one.

XIV.

A thousand times, O Freedom ! have I turned
To thy rapt face, and wished that, martyr-wise,
I might achieve some glory, such as burned
Within the depth of Gordon's azure eyes.
Ah God ! how sweet it were to give thee life,
To aid thy cause, self-sinking in the strife,
Loving thee best, O Freedom ! and in tears
Giving thee thanks for death-accepted years.

XV.

For thou art fearful, though so grand of soul,
Fearful and fearless and the friend of men.
The haughtiest kings shall bow to thy control,
And rich and poor shall take thy guidance then.
Who doubts the daylight when he sees afar
The fading lamp of some night-weary star,
Which, prophet-like, has heard amid the dark
The first faint prelude of the nested lark ?

XVI.

*O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, prompt of thought !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt lash the storm till it be nought !*

XVII.

O thou desired of men ! O thou supreme
And true-toned spirit whom the bards revere !
At times thou com'st in likeness of a dream
To urge rebellion, with a face austere ;

And by that power thou hast—e'en by that power
Which is the outcome of thy sovereign-dower—
Thou teachest slaves, down-trodden, how to stand
Lords of themselves in each chivàlrous Land.

XVIII.

The leaguèd fleets and armies of the law,
Which once were synonyms of pride and hate,
Shall serve, ere long, to keep thy name in awe,
And then collapse, as old and out of date.
Yea ! this shall be ; for God has willed it so.
And none shall touch thy flag, to lay it low ;
And none shall rend thy robe that is to thee
As dawn to day, as sunlight to the sea.

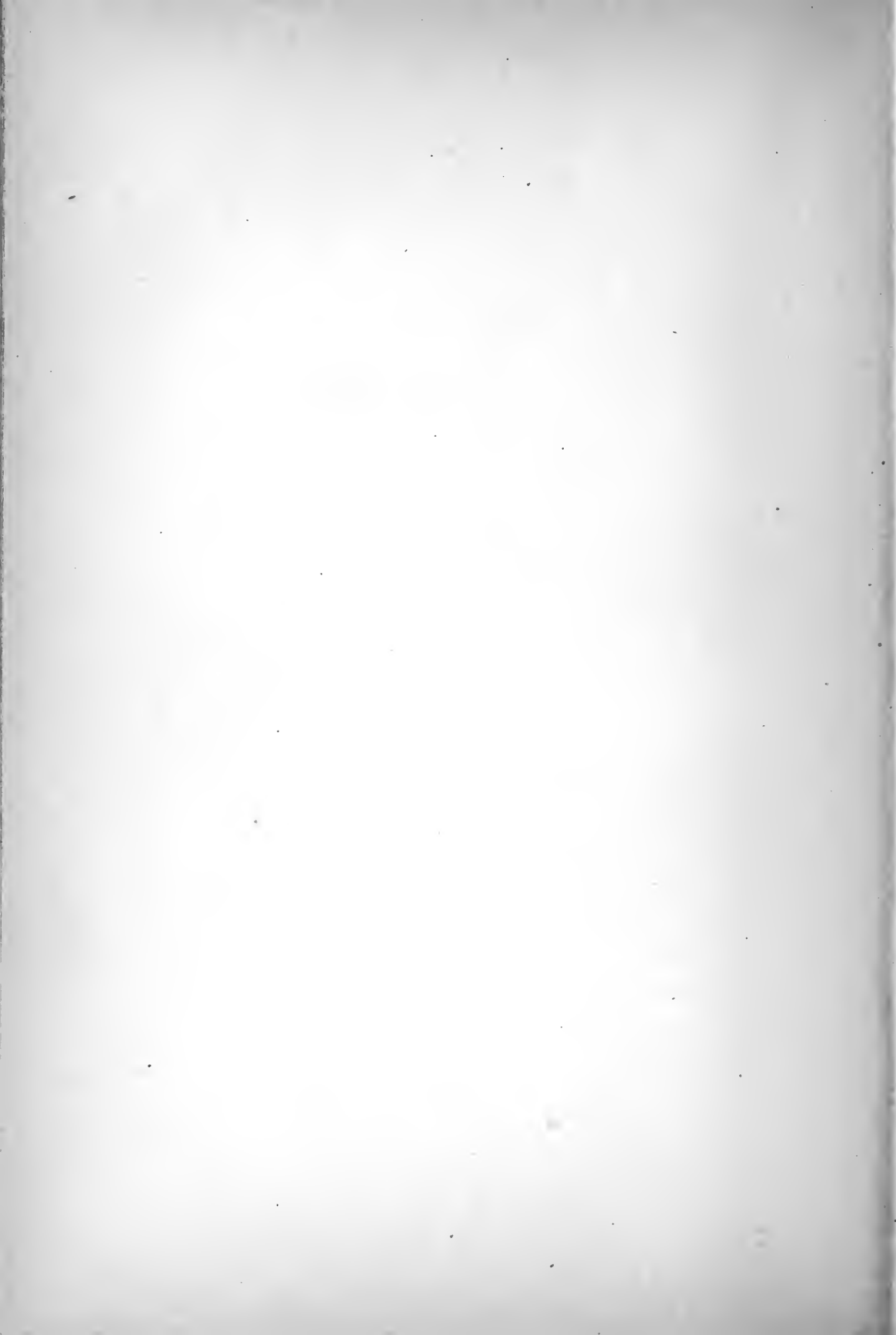
XIX.

O Freedom ! O thou grand and gracious thing !
For love of thee all seas, and every shore,
And all domains whereof the minstrels sing,
Are linked to Man's requirements evermore.
And there shall be, full soon, from north to south,
From east to west, by Wisdom's word of mouth,
One code of laws that all shall understand,
And all the world shall be one Fatherland !

XX.

*O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, sweet of breath !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt pluck Redemption out of Death !*

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.



ANTEROS.

I.

THIS is the feast-day of my soul and me,
For I am half a god and half a man.
These are the hours in which are heard by sea,
By land and wave, and in the realms of space,
The lute-like sounds which sanctify my span,
And give ~~me~~ power to sway the human race.

II.

I am the king whom men call Lucifer,
I am the genius of the nether spheres.
Give me my Christian name, and I demur.
Call me a Greek, and straightway I rejoice.
Yea, I am Anteros, and with my tears
I salt the earth that gladdens at my voice.

III.

I am old Anteros ; a young, old god ;
A sage who smiles and limps upon a crutch.
But I can turn my crutch into a rod,
And change my rod into a crown of wood.
Yea, I am he who conquers with a touch,
And plays with poisons till he makes them good.

IV.

The sun, uprising with his golden hair,
Is mine apostle ; and he serves me well.
Thoughts and desires of mine, beyond compare,
Thrill at his touch. The moon, so lost in thought,
Has pined for love ; and wanderers out of hell,
And saints from heaven, have known what I have
taught.

V.

Great are my griefs ; my joys are multiplex ;
And beasts and birds and men my subjects are ;
Yea, all created things that have a sex,
And flies and flowers and monsters of the mere ;
All these, and more, proclaim me from afar,
And sing my marriage songs from year to year.

VI.

There are no bridals but the ones I make ;
For men are quicken'd when they turn to me.
The soul obeys me for its body's sake,
And each is form'd for each, as day for night.
'Tis but the soul can pay the body's fee
To win the wisdom of a fool's delight.

VII.

Yea, this is so. My clerks have set it down,
And birds have babbled it to the winds of heaven.
The flowers have guessed it, and, in bower and town,
Lovers have sung the songs that I have made.
Give me your lives, O mortals, and, for leaven,
Ye shall receive the fires that cannot fade.

VIII.

O men ! O maidens ! O ye listless ones !
Ye who desert my temples in the East,
Ye who reject the rays of summer suns,
And cling to shadows in the wilderness ;
Why are ye sad ? Why frown ye at the feast,
Ye who have eyes to see and lips to press ?

IX.

Why, for a wisdom that ye will not prove,
A joy that crushes and a love that stings,
A freak, a frenzy in a fated groove,
A thing of nothing, born of less than naught—
Why in your hearts do ye desire these things,
Ye who abhor the joys that ye have sought ?

X.

See, see ! I weep, but I can jest at times ;
Yea, I can dance and toss my tears away.
The sighs I breathe are fragrant as the rhymes
Of men and maids whose hearts are overthrown.
I am the god for whom all maidens pray,
But none shall have me for herself alone.

XI.

No ; I have love enough, here where I stand,
To marry fifty maids in their degree ;
Aye, fifty times five thousand in a band,
And every bride the proxy of a score.
Want ye a mate for millions ? I am he.
Glory is mine, and glee-time evermore.

XII.

O men ! O masters ! O ye kings of grief !
Ye who control the world but not the grave,
What have ye done to make delight so brief,
Ye who have spurn'd the minstrel and the lyre ?
I will not say : " Be patient." Ye are brave ;
And ye shall guess the pangs of my desire.

XIII.

There shall be traitors in the court of love,
And tears and tortures and the bliss of pain.
The maids of men shall seek the gods above,
And drink the nectar of the golden lake.
Blessèd are they for whom the gods are fain
They shall be glad for love's and pity's sake.

XIV.

They shall be taught the songs the syrens know,
The wave's lament, the west wind's psalmistry,
The secrets of the south and of the snow,
The wherewithal of day, and death, and night.
O men ! O maidens ! pray no prayer for me,
But sing to me the songs of my delight.

XV.

Aye, sing to me the songs I love to hear,
And let the sound thereof ascend to heaven.
And let the singers, with a voice of cheer,
Announce my name to all the ends of earth ;
And let my servants, seventy times and seven,
Re-shout the raptures of my Samian mirth !

XVI.

Let joy prevail, and Frenzy, like a flame,
Seize all the souls of men for sake of me.
For I will have Contention put to shame,
And all the hearts of all things comfortèd.
There are no laws but mine on land and sea,
And men shall crown me when their kings are dead.

MY LADY IN WRATH.

I.

O fairest and fondest of nymphs, whom the birds and
the breezes adore,
Be patient with me for a space, ah ! be loving and true
as of yore ;
For if thou art slow to forgive and quick to recall an
offence,
Remember at least I am thine to the uttermost throbbing
of sense !

II.

I am thine in the light of the past, in the light of the
future I'm thine ;
And I kneel to thine image to-day, as a hermit may
kneel at a shrine.
And I know there is safety therein for a man who is
stricken of Fate,
And a comfort for one of us twain in the timely suppression
of hate.

III.

Thou didst call me thy singer of old, and, indeed, I
was proud of the name,
But to-day I have fashioned a song as a victor may
fashion a fame.

And behold ! it is marred in its flight as a bird that has
broken its wings,
And the chords of the lute are entranced with the
weight of the wonder of things.

IV.

And yet it is true, as I live ! I was chosen by thee
and ordained ;
I was girt by the gleam of thy hair ; in the meshes
thereof I was chained.
At the sound of thy voice I was thrilled, and the
thrilling thereof was astir
With the meanings of many delights that the summer
was soon to confer.

V.

O Love ! by the token of tears and the touch of a
vanished content,
By the arrow that flies to the mark when the bow of
the spoiler is bent ;
By the dreams I am loth to discard, by the woes I
am fain to rehearse,
I implore thee, be gentle in time, that my life may be
freed of thy curse !

VI.

I remember how cold it became when I saw thee in
silence depart ;
And I felt as I bade thee adieu that the linnet was
breaking my heart.

For the song that it sang was a dirge, though it
seemed to be singing of June,
And the breezes had caught the despair that was hid
in the depths of the tune.

VII.

I was moved ; I was like to go mad ! I was learning
my lesson by rote ;
And I wondered how soon I should die, as I stifled
the sob in my throat.
For a dove may be angered—I learned—and a saint
may forget to be kind,
And a lily may dream of the snow while the summer's
afloat on the wind !

VIII.

It was shown in the days that are gone, it was known
in the nights that are passed,
It was proved in the pomp of the sun and the
mystical moan of the blast ;
But now it is also revealed that a rose may remember
its thorn—
And I weep when I think of it all in the hush of the
coming of morn.

IX.

I will turn to the truths that endure, for the sake of
thy love I will turn,
To the sweetness and comfort of tears,—and the
teachings thereof I will learn.

For a man must be hard as a rock and callous as one
 who is dead
 If he cannot be thankful at last for the tears he is
 prompted to shed.

X.

Aye, lady! believe it of me : I would rather be slain
 in the night,
 I would rather be thrown in the sea when the hurri-
 cane's ready to smite,
 I would rather be hunted of wolves, in a winter of
 havoc and dearth,
 Than endure the disdain of an hour from the sweetest
 of women on earth !

.

XI.

So come to me, come, O my Joy ! in the morrow
 that waits for us both,
 And the Future will pardon the Past for the seeming
 collapse of an oath ;
 And the hope that is centred in thee, when the right
 to invest it is won,
 Will illumine and gladden the world with a glory sur-
 passing the sun !

THE WAKING OF THE LARK.

I.

O BONNIE bird, that in the brake, exultant, does prepare thee—

As poets do whose thoughts are true, for wings that will upbear thee—

Oh ! tell me, tell me, bonnie bird,

Canst thou not pipe of hope deferred ?

Or canst thou sing of naught but Spring among the golden meadows ?

II.

Methinks a bard (and thou art one) should suit his song to sorrow,

And tell of pain, as well as gain, that waits us on the morrow ;

But thou art not a prophet, thou,

If naught but joy can touch thee now ;

If, in thy heart, thou hast no vow that speaks of Nature's anguish.

III.

Oh ! I have held my sorrows dear, and felt, tho' poor and slighted,

The songs we love are those we hear when love is unrequited.

But thou art still the slave of dawn,
And canst not sing till night be gone.
Till o'er the pathway of the fawn the sunbeams shine
and quiver.

IV.

Thou art the minion of the sun that rises in his splendour,
And canst not spare for Dian fair the songs that
should attend her.
The moon, so sad and silver-pale,
Is mistress of the nightingale;
And thou wilt sing on hill and dale no ditties in the
darkness.

V.

For Queen and King thou wilt not spare one note of
thine outpouring ;
And thou'rt as free as breezes be on Nature's velvet
flooring.
The daisy, with its hood undone,
The grass, the sunlight, and the sun—
These are the joys, thou holy one, that pay thee for
thy singing.

VI.

Oh, hush ! Oh, hush ! how wild a gush of rapture in
the distance—
A roll of rhymes, a toll of chimes, a cry for love's
assistance ;
A sound that wells from happy throats,
A flood of song where beauty floats,
And where our thoughts, like golden boats, do seem
to cross a river.

VII.

This is the advent of the lark—the priest in grey
apparel—

Who doth prepare to trill in air his sinless Summer
carol ;

 This is the prelude to the lay
 The birds did sing in Cæsar's day,
And will again, for aye and aye, in praise of God's
creation.

VIII.

O dainty thing, on wonder's wing, by life and love
elated,

Oh ! sing aloud from cloud to cloud, till day be con-
secrated ;

 Till from the gateways of the morn,
 The sun, with all his light unshorn,
His robes of darkness round him torn, doth scale the
lofty heavens !

A BALLAD OF KISSES.

I.

THERE are three kisses that I call to mind,
And I will sing their secrets as I go.
The first, a kiss too courteous to be kind,
Was such a kiss as monks and maidens know
As sharp as frost, as blameless as the snow.

II.

The second kiss, ah God ! I feel it yet,
And evermore my soul will loathe the same.
The toys and joys of fate I may forget,
But not the touch of that divided shame :
It clove my lips ; it burnt me like a flame.

III.

The third, the final kiss, is one I use
Morning and noon and night ; and not amiss.
Sorrow be mine if such I do refuse !
And when I die, be love, enrapt in bliss,
Re-sanctified in Heaven by such a kiss.

MARY ARDEN.

I.

O THOU to whom, athwart the perish'd days
And parted nights, long sped, we lift our gaze,
Behold! I greet thee with a modern rhyme.
Love-lit and reverent as befits the time,
To solemnize the feast-day of thy son.

II.

And who was he who flourish'd in the smiles
Of thy fair face? 'Twas Shakespeare of the Isles,
Shakespeare of England, whom the world has known
As thine, and ours, and Glory's, in the zone
Of all the seas and all the lands of earth.

III.

He was unfamous when he came to thee,
But sound, and sweet, and good for eyes to see,
And born at Stratford, on St. George's Day,
A week before the wondrous month of May;
And God therein was gracious to us all.

IV.

He lov'd thee, Lady ! and he lov'd the world ;
And, like a flag, his fealty was unfurl'd ;
And Kings who flourished ere thy son was born
Shall live through him, from morn to furthest morn,
In all the far-off cycles yet to come.

V.

He gave us Falstaff, and a hundred quips,
A hundred mottoes from immortal lips ;
And, year by year, we smile to keep away
The generous tears that mind us of the sway
Of his great singing, and the pomp thereof.

VI.

His was the nectar of the gods of Greece,
The lute of Orpheus, and the Golden Fleece
Of grand endeavour ; and the thunder-roll
Of words majestic, which, from pole to pole,
Have borne the tidings of our English tongue.

VII.

He gave us Hamlet ; and he taught us more
Than schools have taught us ; and his fairy-lore
Was fraught with science ; and he called from death
Verona's Lovers, with the burning breath
Of their great passion that has filled the spheres.

VIII.

He made us know Cordelia, and the man
Who murder'd sleep, and baleful Caliban ;
And, one by one, athwart the gloom appear'd
Maidens and men and myths who were revered
In olden days, before the earth was sad.

IX.

Aye ! this is true. It was ordainèd so ;
He was thine own, three hundred years ago ;
But ours to-day ; and ours till earth be red
With doom-day splendour for the quick and dead,
And days and nights be scattered like the leaves.

X.

It was for this he lived, for this he died :
To raise to Heaven the face that never lied,
To lean to earth the lips that should become
Fraught with conviction when the mouth was dumb,
And all the firm, fine body turn'd to clay.

XI.

He lived to seal, and sanctify, the lives
Of perish'd maids, and uncreated wives,
And gave them each a space wherein to dwell ;
And for his mother's sake he loved them well
And made them types undying of all truth.

XII.

O fair and fond young mother of the boy
Who wrought all this—O Mary !—in thy joy
Did'st thou perceive, when, fitful from his rest,
He turn'd to thee, that his would be the best
Of all men's chanting since the world began ?

XIII.

Did'st thou, O Mary ! with the eye of trust
Perceive, prophetic, through the dark and dust
Of things terrene, the glory of thy son,
And all the pride therein that should be won
By toilsome men, content to be his slaves ?

XIV.

Did'st thou, good mother ! in the tender ways
That women find to fill the fleeting days,
Behold afar the Giant who should rise
With foot on earth, and forehead in the skies,
To write his name, and thine, among the stars ?

XV.

I love to think it ; and, in dreams at night
I see thee stand, erect, and all in white,
With hands out-yearning to that mighty form,
As if to draw him back from out the storm—
A child again, and thine to nurse withal.

XVI.

I see thee, pale and pure, with flowing hair,
And big, bright eyes—far-searching in the air
For thy sweet babe—and, in a trice of time,
I see the boy advance to thee, and climb,
And call thee “Mother !” in ecstatic tones.

XVII.

Yet, if my thought be vain—if, by a touch
Of this weak hand, I vex thee overmuch—
Forbear the blame, sweet Spirit ! and endow
My heart with fervour while to thee I bow
Athwart the threshold of my fading dream.

XVIII.

For—though so seeming-bold in this my song—
I turn to thee with reverence, in the throng
Of words and thoughts, as shepherds scann’d, afar,
The famed effulgence of that eastern star
Which usher’d in the Crown’d One of the heavens.

XIX.

In dreams of rapture I have seen thee pass
Along the banks of Avon, by the grass,
As fair as that fair Juliet whom thy son
Endow’d with life, but with the look of one
Who knows the nearest way to some new grave.

XX.

And often, too, I've seen thee in the flush
Of thy full beauty, while the mother's "Hush!"
Hung on thy lip, and all thy tangled hair
Re-clothed a bosom that in part was bare
Because a tiny hand had toy'd therewith!

XXI

Oh! by the June-tide splendour of thy face
When, eight weeks old, the child in thine embrace
Did leap and laugh—O Mary! by the same,
I bow to thee, subservient to thy fame,
And call thee England's Pride for evermore!

SACHAL.

A WAIF OF BATTLE.

I.

Lo ! at my feet,
A something pale of hue ;
A something sad to view ;
Dead or alive I dare not call it sweet.

II.

Not white as snow ;
Not transient as a tear !
A warrior left it here.
It was his passport ere he met the foe.

III.

Here is a name,
A word upon the book ;
If ye but kneel to look,
Ye'll find the letters " Sachal " on the same.

IV.

His Land to cherish,
He died at twenty-seven.
There are no wars in Heaven,
But when he fought he gain'd the right to perish.

v.

Where was he born ?
In France, at Puy le Dôme,
A wanderer from his home,
He found a Fatherland beyond the morn.

vi.

'Twas France's plan ;
The cause he did not ask.
His life was but a mask,
And he upraised it, martyr'd at Sedan ;

vii.

And prone in death,
Beyond the name of France,
Beyond his hero glance—
He thought, belike, of her who gave him breath.

viii.

O thou dead son !
O Sachal ! far away,
But not forgot to-day,
I had a mother too, but now have none.

ix.

Our hopes are brave.
Our faiths are braver still.
The soul shall no man kill ;
For God will find us, each one in his grave.

X.

A land more vast
Than Europe's kingdoms are—
A brighter, nobler star
Than victory's fearful light—is thine at last.

XI.

And should'st thou meet
Yon Germans up on high—
Thy foes when death was nigh—
Nor thou nor they will sound the soul's retreat.

XII.

For all are just,
Yea, all are patriots there,
And thou, O Fils de Pierre !
Hast found thy marshal's baton in the dust.

XIII.

Oh, farewell, friend ;
My friend, albeit unknown,
Save in thy death alone,
Oh, fare thee well till sin and sorrow end.

XIV.

In realms of joy
We'll meet ; aye, every one :
Mother and sire and son,—
And my poor mother, too, will claim her boy.

XV.

Death leads to God.
 Death is the Sword of Fate.
 Death is the Golden Gate
 That opens up to glory, through the sod.

XVI.

And thou that road,
 O Sachal ! thou hast found ;
 A king is not so crown'd
 As thou art, soldier ! in thy blest abode.

XVII.

Deathless in death,
 Exalted, not destroy'd,
 Thou art in Heaven employ'd,
 To swell the songs of angels with thy breath!

THE LADY OF THE MAY.

I.

O STARS that fade in amber skies
Because ye dread the light of day,
O moon so lonely and so wise,
Look down, and love my Love alway;
Salute the Lady of the May.

II.

O lark that soarest in the light
To hail thy lord in his array,
Look down; be just; and sing aright.
A lover claims thy song to-day
To greet his Lady of the May.

III.

“O lady! lady!” sings the lark,
“Thy lover’s hest I do obey;
For thou art splendid after dark,
And where thou smilest, there is day;
And thou’rt the Lady of the May.

IV

“The nightingale’s a friend of mine,
And yesternight she flew my way.
‘Awake,’ she cried, ‘at morning shine,
And sing for me thy blythest lay
To greet the Lady of the May.’

V.

“‘And tell her, tell her, gentle one,
While thou attun’st thy morning lay,
That I will sing at set of sun
Another song for thy sweet fay,
Because she’s Lady of the May.’

VI.

“And, lo! I come,” the lark in air,
Self-pois’d and free, did seem to say,
“I come to greet thy lady’s hair
And call its beams the light of day
Which decks thy Lady of the May.”

VII.

Oh, thank thee, bird that singest well!
For all thou say’st and still would’st say
And for the thoughts which Philomel
Intends to trill, in roundelay,
To greet my Lady of the May.

VIII.

We two (my Love and I) are one,
And so shall be, for aye and aye.
Go, take my homage to the sun,
And bid him shine his best to-day,
To crown my Lady of the May!

AN ODE TO ENGLISHMEN.

I.

I WHO have sung of love and lady bright,
And mirth and music and the world's delight,
Behold ! to-day, I sound a sterner note
To move the minds of foemen when they fight.

II.

HAVE I not said : There is no sweeter thing,
And none diviner than the wedding-ring ?
And, all intent to make my meaning plain,
Have I not kiss'd the lips of Love, the King ?

III.

Yea, this is so. But lo ! to-day there comes
The far-off sound of trumpets and of drums ;
And I must parley with the men of toil
Who rise in ranks exultant from the slums.

IV.

I must arraign each man ; yea, all the host ;
And each true soul shall learn the least and most
Of all his wrongs—if wrongs indeed they be ;
And he shall face the flag that guards the coast.

V.

He shall salute it ! He shall find therein
Salve for his wounds and solace for his sin.
Brother and guide is he who loves his Land ;
But he is kinless who denies his kin.

VI.

Has he a heart to feel, a knee to bend,
And will not trust his country to the end ?
If this be so, God help him to a tear !
He shall be foiled, as foeman and as friend.

VII.

Bears he a sword ? I care not. He is base ;
Unfit to wield it, and of meaner place
Than tongue may tell of, in the Senate House ;
And he shall find no balm for his disgrace.

VIII.

O men ! I charge ye, in the name of Him,
Who rules the world, and guards the cherubim,
I charge ye, pause, ere from the lighted track
Ye turn, distraught, to pathways that are dim.

IX.

Who gave your fathers, and your fathers' sons,
The rights ye claim, amid the roar of guns,
And 'mid the flash thereof from sea to sea ?
Your country ! through her lov'd, her chosen ones.

X.

Oh, ye are dastards if ye lift a hand,
Dastards and fools, if, loveless in a band,
 Ye touch in wrath the bulwark of the realm.
Ye shall be baulk'd, and Chivalry shall stand.

XI.

I have a sword, I also, and I swear
By my heart's faith, and by my Lady's hair,
 That I will strike the first of ye that moves,
If by a sign ye wrong the flag ye bear.

XII.

In Freedom's name, in hers to whom we bow,
In her great name, I charge ye, palter now
 With no traducer of your country's cause.
Accurst of God is he who breaks his vow !

ZULALIE.

I.

I AM the sprite
That reigns at night,
My body is fair for man's delight.
I leap and laugh
As the wine I quaff,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

II.

I curse and swear
In my demon-lair;
I shake wild sunbeams out of my hair.
I madden the old,
I gladden the bold,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

III.

Of churchyard stone
I have made my throne;
My locks are looped with a dead man's bone.
Mine eyes are red
With the tears I shed,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

IV.

In cities and camps
I have lighted my lamps,
My kisses are caught by kings and tramps.
With rant and revel
My hair I dishevel,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

V.

My kisses are stains,
Mine arms are chains,
My forehead is fair and false like Cain's.
My gain is loss,
Mine honour is dross—
And I am the queen of Astrofelle !

BEETHOVEN AT THE PIANO.

I.

SEE where Beethoven sits alone—a dream of days
 elysian,
A crownless king upon a throne, reflected in a vision—
The man who strikes the potent chords which make
 the world, in wonder,
Acknowledge him, though poor and dim, the mouth-
 piece of the thunder.

II.

He feels the music of the skies the while his heart is
 breaking ;
He sings the songs of Paradise, where love has no
 forsaking ;
And, though so deaf he cannot hear the tempest as a
 token,
He makes the music of his mind the grandest ever
 spoken.

III.

He doth not hear the whispered word of love in his
 seclusion,
Or voice of friend, or song of bird, in Nature's sad
 confusion ;
But he hath made, for Love's sweet sake, so wild a
 declamation
That all true lovers of the earth have claim'd him of
 their nation.

IV.

He had a Juliet in his youth, as Romeo had before him,
And, Romeo-like, he sought to die that she might then
 adore him ;
But she was weak, as women are whose faith has not
 been proven,
And would not change her name for his—Guiciardi for
 Beethoven.

V.

O minstrel, whom a maiden spurned, but whom a
 world has treasured !
O sovereign of a grander realm than man has ever
 measured !
Thou hast not lost the lips of love, but thou hast gain'd
 in glory,
The love of all who know the thrall of thine immortal
 story.

VI.

Thou art the bard whom none discard, but whom all
 men discover
To be a god, as Orpheus was, albeit a lonely lover ;
A king to call the stones to life beside the roaring
 ocean,
And bid the stars discourse to trees in words of man's
 emotion.

VII.

A king of joys, a prince of tears, an emperor of the
 seasons,
Whose songs are like the sway of years in Love's im-
 mortal reasons ;

A bard who knows no life but this : to love and be
rejected,
And reproduce in earthly strains the prayers of the
elected.

VIII.

O poet heart ! O seraph soul ! by men and maids
adorèd !
O Titan with the lion's mane, and with the splendid
forehead !
We men who bow to thee in grief must tremble in our
gladness,
To know what tears were turned to pearls to crown
thee in thy sadness.

IX.

An Angel by direct descent, a German by alliance,
Thou didst intone the wonder-chords which made
Despair a science.
Yea, thou didst strike so grand a note that, in its large
vibration,
It seemed the roaring of the sea in nature's jubilation.

X.

O Sire of Song ! Sonata-King ! Sublime and loving
master ;
The sweetest soul that ever struck an octave in dis-
aster ;
In thee were found the fires of thought—the splen-
dours of endeavour—
And thou shalt sway the minds of men for ever and
for ever !

A RHAPSODY OF DEATH.

I.

THAT phantoms fair, with radiant hair,
May seek at midnight hour
The sons of men, belov'd again,
And give them holy power ;
That souls survive the mortal hive, and sinless come
and go,
Is true as death, the prophet saith ; and God will have
it so.

II.

For who be ye who doubt and prate ?
O sages ! make it clear
If ye be more than men of fate,
Or less than men of cheer ;
If ye be less than bird or beast ? O brothers ! make it
plain
If ye be bankrupts at a feast, or sharers in a gain.

III.

You say there is no future state ;
The clue ye fail to find.
The flesh is here, and bones appear
When graves are undermined.
But of the soul, in time of dole, what answer can ye
frame—
Ye who have heard no spirit-word to guide ye to the
same ?

IV.

Ah! facts are good, and reason's good,
But fancy's stronger far;
In weal or woe we only know
We know not what we are.
The sunset seems a raging fire, the clouds roll back,
afraid;
The rainbow seems a broken lyre on which the storm
has play'd.

V.

But these, ye urge, are outward signs.
Such signs are not for you.
The sight's deceiv'd and truth bereav'd
By diamonds of the dew.
The sage's mind is more refined, his rapture more
complete;
He almost knows the little rose that blossoms at his
feet!

VI.

The sage can kill a thousand things,
And tell the names of all;
And wrench away the wearied wings
Of eagles when they fall;
And calmly trace the lily's grace, or fell the strongest
tree,
And almost feel, if not reveal, the secrets of the sea.

VII.

But can he set, by day or night,
The clock-work of the skies?
Or bring the dead man back to sight
With soul-invested eyes?

Can he describe the ways of life, the wondrous ways
of death,
And whence it came, and what the flame that feeds
the vital breath?

VIII.

If he could do such deeds as these,
He might, though poor and low,
Explain the cause of Nature's laws,
Which none shall ever know ;
He might recall the vanish'd years by lifting of his
hand,
And bid the wind go north or south to prove what he
has plann'd.

IX.

But God is just. He burdens not
The shoulders of the sage ;
He pities him whose sight is dim ;
He turns no second page.
There are two pages to the book. We men have read
the one ;
The other needs a spirit-look, in lands beyond the sun.

X.

The other needs a poet's eye,
Like that of Milton blind ;
The light of Faith which cannot die,
Though doubts perplex the mind ;
The eyesight of a little child ; a martyr's eye in dole,
Which sees afar the golden star that shines upon the
soul !

A PRAYER FOR LIGHT.

I.

Oh, give me light, to-day, or let me die—
The light of love, the love-light of the sky—
That I, at length, may see my darling's face
One minute's space.

II.

Have I not wept to know myself so weak
That I can feel, not see, the dimpled cheek,
The lips, the eyes, the sunbeams that enfold
Her locks of gold?

III.

Have I not sworn that I will not be wed,
But mate my soul with hers on my death-bed?
The soul can see—for souls are seraphim—
When eyes are dim.

IV.

Oh, hush! she comes. I know her. She is nigh.
She brings me death, true heart, and I will die.
She brings me love, for love and life are one
Beyond the sun.

V.

This is the measure, this, of all my joys :
Life is a curse and Death's a counterpoise.
Give me thy hand, O sweet one, let me know
Which path I go.

VI.

I cannot die if thou be not a-near,
To lead me on to Life's appointed sphere.
O spirit-face, O angel, with thy breath
Kiss me to death!

MIRAGE.

I.

'Tis a legend of a lover,
'Tis a ballad to be sung,
In the gloaming—under cover—
By a minstrel who is young ;
By a singer who has passion, and who sways us with
his tongue.

II.

I, who know it, think upon it,
Not unhappy, tho' in tears,
And I gather in a sonnet
All the glory of the years ;
And I kiss and clasp a shadow when the substance
disappears.

III.

Ah ! I see her as she faced me,
In the sinless summer days,
When her little hands embraced me,
And I saddened at her gaze,
Thinking, Sweet One ! will she love me when we walk
in other ways ?

IV.

Will she cling to me as kindly
When the childish faith is lost?
Will she pray for me as blindly,
Or but weigh the wish and cost,
Looking back on our lost Eden from the girlhood she
has cross'd?

V.

Oh! I swear by all I honour,
By the graves that I endow,
By the grace I set upon her,
That I meant the early vow—
Meant it much as men and women mean the same
thing spoken now.

VI.

But her maiden troth is broken,
And her mind is ill at ease,
And she sends me back no token
From her home beyond the seas;
And I know, though nought is spoken, that she thanks
me on her knees.

VII.

Yes, for pardon freely granted;
For she wrong'd me, understand.
And my life is disenchantèd,
As I wander through the land
With the sorrows of dark morrows that await me in a
band.

VIII.

Hers was sweetest of sweet faces,
Hers the tenderest eyes of all !
In her hair she had the traces
Of a heavenly coronal,
Bringing sunshine to sad places where the sunlight
could not fall.

IX.

She was fairer than a vision ;
Like a vision, too, has flown.
I, who flushed at her decision,
Lo ! I languish here alone ;
And I tremble when I tell you that my anger was
mine own.

X.

Not for her, sweet sainted creature !
Could I curse her to her face ?
Could I look on form and feature,
And deny the inner grace ?
Like a little wax Madonna she was holy in the place.

XI.

And I told her, in mad fashion,
That I loved her—would incline
All my life to this one passion,
And would kneel as at a shrine ;
And would love her late and early, and would teach
her to be mine.

XII.

Now in dreams alone I meet her
With my lowly human praise :
She is sweeter and completer,
And she smiles on me always ;
But I dare not rise and greet her as I did in early
days.

A MOTHER'S NAME.

I.

I LOVE the sound ! The sweetest under Heaven,
That name of mother—and the proudest, too.
As babes we breathe it, and with seven times seven
Of youthful prayers, and blessings that accrue,
We still repeat the word, with tender steven.
Dearest of friends ! dear mother ! what we do
This side the grave, in purity of aim,
Is glorified at last by thy good name.

II.

But how forlorn the word, how full of woe,
When she who bears it lies beneath the clod !
In vain the orphan child would call her so—
She comes not back : her place is up with God.
The wintry winds are wailing o'er the snow ;
The flowers are dead that once did grace the sod.
Ah, lose not heart ! Some flowers may fade in gloom,
But Hope's a plant grows brightest on the tomb !

A SONG OF SERVITUDE.

I.

THIS is a song of serfs that I have made,
 A song of sympathy for grief and joy :—
 The old, the young, the lov'd and the betrayed,
 All, all must serve, for all must be obeyed.

II.

There are no tyrants but the serving ones,
 There are no servants but the men who rule.
 The Captain conquers with his army's guns,
 But he himself is conquered by his sons.

III.

What is a parent but a daughter's slave,
 A son's retainer when the lad is ill ?
 The great Creator loves the good and brave,
 And makes a flower the spokesman of a grave.

IV.

The son is servant in his father's halls,
 The daughter is her mother's maid-of-work.
 The welkin wonders when the ocean calls,
 And earth accepts the raindrop when it falls.

There are no "ups" in life, there are no "downs,"
For "high" and "low" are words of like degree ;
He who is light of heart when Fortune frowns,
He is a king though nameless in the towns.

VI.

None is so lofty as the sage who prays,
None so unhigh as he who will not kneel.
The breeze is servant to the summer days,
And he is bowed-to most who most obeys.

VII.

These are the maxims that I take to heart,
Do thou accept them, reader, for thine own ;
Love well thy work ; be truthful in the mart,
And foes will praise thee when thy friends depart.

VIII.

None shall upbraid thee then for thine estate,
Or show thee meaner than thou art in truth.
Make friends with death ; and God, who is so great,
He will assist thee to a nobler fate.

IX.

None are unfit to serve upon their knees
The saints of prayer, unseen but quick to hear.
The flowers are servants to the pilgrim bees,
And wintry winds are tyrants of the trees.

X.

All things are good ; all things incur a debt,
And all must pay the same, or soon or late
The sun will rise betimes, but he must set ;
And man must seek the laws he would forget.

XI.

There are no mockeries in the universe,
No false accounts, no errors that will thrive.
The work we do, the good things we rehearse,
Are boons of Nature basely named a curse.

XII.

"Give us our daily bread !" the children pray,
And mothers plead for them while thus they speak.
But "Give us work, O God !" we men should say,
That we may gain our bread from day to day.

XIII.

'Tis not alone the crown that makes the king ;
'Tis service done, 'tis duty to his kind.
The lark who soars so high is quick to sing,
And proud to yield allegiance to the spring.

XIV.

And we who serve ourselves, whate'er befall,
Athwart the dangers of the day's behests,
Oh, let's not shirk, at joy's, or sorrow's, call,
The service due to God who serves us all !

SYLVIA IN THE WEST.

I.

What shall be done? I dare not pray;
Nor shall I stint the pangs I feel.
If prayers could alter night to day—
Or black to white—I might appeal;
I might attempt to sway thy heart,
And prove it mine, or claim a part.

II.

I might attempt to urge on thee
At least the chance of some redress;—
An hour's revoke—a moment's plea—
A smile to make my sorrows less.
I might indeed be taught in time
To blush for hope, as for a crime!

III.

But thou art stone, though soft and fleet—
A statue, not a maiden, thou!
A man may hear thy bosom beat
When thou hast sworn some idle vow.
But not for love, no! not for this;
For thou wilt sell thy bridal kiss.

IV.

I mean, thy friends will sell thy love,
As loves are sold in England, here.
A man will buy my golden dove—
I doubt he'll find his bargain dear !
He'll lose the wine ; he'll buy the bowl,
The life, the limbs,—but not the soul.

V.

So, take thy mate and all his wealth,
And all the joys that wait on fame.
Thou'lt weep—poor martyr'd one !—by stealth,
And think of me, and shriek my name ;
Yes, in his arms ! And wake, too late,
To coax and kiss the man you hate.

VI.

By slow degrees, from year to year,
From week to week, from night to night,
He will be taught how dark and drear
Is barter'd love—how sad to sight
A perjured face ! He will be driven
To compass Hell—and dream of Heaven.

VII.

But stand at God's high altar there,
With saints around thee tall and sweet,
I'll match thy pride with my despair,
And drag thee down from glory's seat.
Yea, thou shalt kneel ! Thy head shall bow
As mine is bent in anguish now.

VIII.

What ! for thy sake have I forsworn
My just ambition—all my joy,
And all my hope from morn to morn,
That seem'd a prize without alloy ?
Have I done this ? I have ; and see !
I weep wild tears for thine and thee.

IX.

But I can school my soul to strength,
And weep and wail as children do ;
Be hard as stone, yet melt at length,
And curb my pride as thou can'st, too !
But I have faith, and thou hast none ;
And I have joy, but thine is done.

X.

No marriage-bells ? No songs, you say ?
No flowers to grace our bridal morn ?
No wine ? No kiss ? No wedding-day ?
I care not ! Oaths are all forsworn ;
And, when I clasp'd thy hand so white,
I meant to curse thee, girl, to-night.

XI.

And so I shall—Oh ! doubt not that.
At stroke of twelve I'll curse thee twice.
When screams the owl, when swoops the bat,
When ghosts are out, I'll curse thee thrice.
And thou shalt hear !—Aye, by my troth,
One song will suit the souls of both.

XII.

I curse thy face ; I curse thy hair ;
 I curse thy lips that smile so well,
 Thy life, thy love and my despair,
 My loveless couch, thy wedding-bell ;
 My soul and thine !—Ah, see ! though black,
 I take one half my curses back.

XIII.

For thou and I were form'd for hate,
 For love, for scorn ; no matter what.
 I am thy Fere and thou my Fate,
 And fire and flood shall harm us not.
 Thou shalt be kill'd and hid from ken,
 And fiends will sing thy requiem then.

XIV.

Yet think not Death will serve thy stead ;
 I'll find thy grave, though wall'd in stone.
 I'll move thy mould to make my bed,
 And lie with thee long hours alone :—
 Long, lifeless hours ! Ah God, how free,
 How pale, how cold, thy lips will be ?

XV.

But graves are cells of truth and love,
 And men may talk no treason there.
 A corpse will wear no wedding-glove,
 A ghost will make no sign in air.
 But ghosts can pray ? Well, let them kneel ;
 They, too, must loathe the love they feel.

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XVI.

Ah me ! to sleep and yet to wake,
To live so long, and yet to die ;
To sing sad songs for Sylvia's sake,
And yet no peace to gain thereby !
What have I done ? What left unsaid ?
Nay, I will count my tears instead.

XVII.

Here is a word of wild design.
Here is a threat ; 'twas meant to warn.
Here is a fierce and freezing line,
As hot as hate, as cold as scorn.
Ah, friend ! forgive ; forbear my rhymes,
But pray for me, sweet soul ! sometimes.

XVIII.

Had I a curse to spare to-day,
(Which I have not) I'd use it now.
I'd curse my hair, to turn it gray,
I'd teach my back to bend and bow ;
I'd make myself so old and thin
That I should seem too sad to sin.

XIX.

And then we'd meet, we two, at night ;
And I should know what saints have known.
Thou would'st not tremble, dear, for fright,
Or shriek to meet me there alone.
I should not then be spurned for this
Or want a smile, or need a kiss.

XX.

I should not then be fierce as fire,
Or mad as sin, or sharp as knife ;
My heart would throb with no desire,
For care would cool the flush of life ;
And I should love thee, spotless one,
As pilgrims love some holy nun.

XXI.

Ah queen-like creature ! smile on me ;
Be kind, be good ; I lov'd thee much.
I thank thee, see ! on bended knee.
I seek salvation in thy touch.
And when I sleep, I watch thee come,
And both are wild, and one is dumb.

XXII.

I draw thee, ghost-like, to my heart ;
I kiss thy lips and call thee mine.
Of thy sweet soul I form a part,
And my poor soul is part of thine.
Ah, kill me, kiss me, curse me, Thou !
But let me be thy servant now.

XXIII.

What ! did I curse thy golden hair ?
Well, then, the sun will set at noon ;
The face that keeps the world so fair
Is thine, not his ! he darkens soon.
Thy smile awakes the bird of dawn,
And day departs when thou art gone.

XXIV.

Oh ! had I groves in some sweet star
That shines in Heaven the whole night through—
A steed with wings—a golden car—
A something wild and strange and true :—
A fairy's wand—an angel's crown—
I'd merge them all in thy renown.

XXV.

I'd give thee queens to wait on thee,
And kings to kneel to thee in prayer,
And seraph-boys by land and sea
To do thy bidding—earth and air
To pay thee homage—all the flowers—
And all the nymphs in all the bowers.

XXVI.

And this our love should last for aye,
And we should live these thousand years.
We'd meet in Mars on Christmas Day,
And make the tour of all the spheres.
We'd do strange things ! Sweet stars would shine,
And Death would spare my love and thine.

XXVII.

But these are dreams ; and dreams are vain ;
Mine most of all—so heed them not.
Brave thoughts will die, though men complain,
And mine was bold ! 'Tis now forgot.
Well ; let me bless thee, ere I sleep,
And give thee all my joys to keep.

XXVIII.

I bless the house where thou wast born,
I bless the hours of every night,
And every hour from flush of morn
Till death of day, for thy delight ;
I bless the sunbeams as they shine,—
So like those golden locks of thine !

XXIX.

I bless thy lips, thy lustrous eyes,
Thy face, thy feet, thy forehead fair,
The light that shines in summer skies—
In garden walks when thou art there—
And all the grass beneath thy feet,
And all the songs thou singest, Sweet !

XXX.

But blessing thus—ah, woe's the day !—
I know what tears I shall not shed,
What flowers will bloom, and,—bright as they,—
What bells will ring when I am dead.
Ah, kill me, kiss me, curse me, Thou !
But let me be thy minstrel now.

ELEANORE.

I.

THE forest flowers are faded all,
The winds complain, the snow-flakes fall,
 Elëanore !
I turn to thee, as to a bower :—
Thou breathest beauty like a flower,
Thou smilest like a happy hour,
 Elëanore !

II.

I turn to thee. I bless afar
Thy name, which is my guiding-star,
 Elëanore !
And yet, ah God ! when thou art here
I faint, I hold my breath for fear.
Art thou some phantom wandering near,
 Elëanore ?

III.

Oh, take me to thy bosom fair ;
Oh, cover me with thy golden hair,
 Elëanore !
There let me lie when I am dead,
Those morning-beams about me spread,
The glory of thy face o'erhead,
 Elëanore !

THE STATUE.

I.

SEE where my lady stands,
Lifting her lustrous hands—
Here let me bow.
Image of truth and grace !
Maid with the angel-face !
Earth was no dwelling-place
For such as thou.

II.

Ah, thou unhappy stone,
Make now thy sorrows known ;
Make known thy longing.
Thou art the form of one
Whom I, with hopes undone,
Buried at set of sun—
All the friends thronging.

III.

Thou art some Vision bright
Lost out of Heaven at night,
Far from thy race.

Of, when the others dance,
Come I, with wistful glance,
Fearful lest thou, perchance,
Leave the dark place.

IV.

No ! thou wilt never flee,
Earth has a charm for thee ;—
Why should we sever ?
Years have I seen thee so,
Making pretence to go,
Lifting thine arms of snow—
Voiceless for ever !

V.

Here bring I all my cares,
Here dream and say my prayers
While the bells toll.
O thou beloved saint !
Let not my courage faint,
Let not a shame, or taint,
Injure my soul !

PABLO DE SARASATE.

I.

Who comes, to-day, with sunlight on his face,
And eyes of fire, that have a sorrow's trace,
But are not sad with sadness of the years,
Or hints of tears?

II.

He is a king, or I mistake the sign,
A king of song— a comrade of the Nine—
The Muses' brother, and their youngest one,
This side the sun.

III.

See how he bends to greet his soul's desire,
His violin, which trembles like a lyre,
And seems to trust him, and to know his touch,
Belov'd so much!

IV.

He stands full height ; he draws it to his breast.
Like one, in joy, who takes a wonder-guest—
A weird, wild thing, bewitched from end to end—
To be his friend.

V.

And who can doubt the right it has to lie
So near his heart, and there to sob and sigh,
And there to shake its octaves into notes.
With bird-like throats?

XII.

To prove again that Music, by the plea
Of all men's love, has link'd from sea to sea
All shores of earth in one serene and grand
Symphonic land.

XIII.

Oh ! hush the while ! Oh ! hush ! A bird has sung,
A Mayday bird has trill'd without a tongue,
And now, 'twould seem, has wandered out of sight
For sheer delight.

XIV.

A phantom bird ! 'Tis gone where all things go—
The wind, the rain, the sunshine, and the snow,
The hopes we nurs'd, the dead things lately pass'd—
All dreams at last.

XV.

The towers of light, the castles in the air,
The queenly things with diamonds in their hair,
The toys of sound, the flowers of magic art—
All these depart.

XVI.

They seem'd to live ; and lo ! beyond recall,
They take the sweet sad Silence for a pall,
And, wrapt therein, consent to be dismiss'd,
Though glory-kiss'd.

XVII.

O pride of Spain ! O wizard with a wand
More fraught with fervours of the life beyond
Than books have taught us in these tawdry days,
Take thou my praise.

XVIII.

Aye, take it, Pablo ! Though so poor a thing,
'Twill serve to mind thee of an English spring,
When wealth, and worth, and fashion, each and all,
Obey'd thy thrall.

XIX.

The lark that sings its love-song in the cloud
Is God-inspired and glad,—but is not proud,—
And soon forgets the salvos of the breeze,
As thou dost these.

XX.

The shouts, the praises, and the swift acclaim,
That men have brought to magnify thy name,
Affect thee barely as an idle cheer
Affects a seer.

XXI.

But thou art ours, O Pablo ! ours to-day,
Ours, and not ours, in thy triumphant sway ;
And we must urge it by the right that brings
Honour to kings.

XXII.

Honour to thee, thou stately, thou divine
And far-famed minstrel of a mighty line !
Honour to thee, and peace, and musings high.
Good-night ! Good-bye !

PRO PATRIA.

AN ODE TO SWINBURNE.

[“We have not, alack! an ally to befriend us,
And the season is ripe to extirpate and end us.
Let the German touch hands with the Gaul,
And the fortress of England must fall.

* * * * *

Louder and louder the noise of defiance
Rings rage from the grave of a trustless alliance,
And bids us beware, and be warn'd,
As abhorr'd of all nations and scorn'd.”

A Word for the Nation, by A. C. Swinburne.]

I.

NAY, good Sir Poet, read thy rhymes again,
And curb the tumults that are born in thee,
That now thy hand, relentless, may refrain
To deal the blow that Abel had of Cain.

II.

Are we not Britons born, when all is said,
And thou the offspring of the knightly souls
Who fought for Charles when fears were harvested
And Cromwell rose to power on Charles's head?

III.

O reckless, roystering bard, that in a breath
Did'st find the way to flout thy fathers' flag!
Is't well, unheeding what thy Reason saith,
To seem to triumph in thy country's death?

IV.

If none will speak for us, if none will say
How much thy Muse has wrong'd us in its thought,
'Tis I will do it ; I will say thee nay,
And hurl thee back the ravings of thy lay.

V.

We own thy prowess ; fôr we've learnt by rote
Song after song of thine ; and thou art great.
But why this malice ? Why this wanton note
Which seems to come like lava from thy throat ?

VI.

When Hugo spoke we owned his master-spell ;
We knew he feared us more than he contemned.
He flecked with fire each sentence as it fell,
And tolled his rancours like a wedding-bell.

VII.

And we were proud of him, as France was proud ;
Aye ! called him brother, though he loved us not.
And we were thrilled when, ruthless from a cloud,
The bolt of death outstretch'd him for a shroud.

VIII.

Thou'rt great as he by fame and force of song,
But less than he as spokesman of his Land.
For thou hast rail'd at thine, to do it wrong,
And call'd it coward though its faith is strong.

IX.

England a coward? O thou five foot five
Of flesh and blood and sinew and the rest!
Is she not girt with glory and alive
To hear thee buzz thy scorn of all the hive?

X.

Thou art a bee—a bright, a golden thing
With too much honey; and the taste thereof
Is sometimes rough, and somewhat of a sting
Dwells in the music that we hear thee sing.

XI.

Oh, thou hast wrong'd us; thou hast said of late
More than is good for listeners to repeat.
Nay, I have marvell'd at thy words of hate,
For friends and foes alike have deem'd us great.

XII.

We are not vile! We, too, have hearts to feel;
And not in vain have men remember'd this.
Our hands are quick at times to clasp the steel,
And strike the blows that centuries cannot heal.

XIII.

The sea-ward rocks are proud to be assail'd
By wave and wind; for bluster kills itself,
But rocks endure. And England has prevail'd
Times out of number, when her foes have failed.

XIV.

And once, thou know'st, a giant here was found,
Not bred in France, or elsewhere under sun.
And he was Shakespeare of the whole world round,
And he was king of men, though never crown'd.

XV.

He lov'd the gracious earth from east to west,
And all the seas thereof and all its shores.
But most he lov'd the home that he possess'd,
And, right or wrong, his country seem'd the best.

XVI.

He was content with Albion's classic land.
He lov'd its flag. He veil'd its every fault.
Yes ! he was proud to let its honour stand,
And bring to light the wonders it had plann'd.

XVII.

Do thou thus much ; and deal no further pain ;
But sooner tear the tongue from out thy mouth,
And sooner let the life in thee be slain,
Than strike at One who strikes thee not again.

XVIII.

Thy land and mine, our England, is erect,
And like a lordly thing she looks on thee,
And sees thee number'd with her bards elect,
And will not harm the brow that she has deck'd.

XIX.

She lets thee live. She knows how rich and rare
Are songs like thine, and how the smallest bird
May make much music in the summer air,
And how a curse may turn into a prayer.

XX.

Take back thy taunt, I say ; and with the same
Accept our pardon ; or, if this offend,
Why then no pardon, e'en in England's name.
We have our country still, and thou thy fame !

THE LITTLE GRAVE.

I.

A LITTLE mound of earth
Is all the land I own :
Death gave it me—five feet by three—
And mark'd it with a stone.

II.

My home, my garden-grave,
Where most I long to go !
The ground is mine by right divine,
And Heaven will have it so.

III.

For here my darling sleeps,
Unseen—arrayed in white—
And o'er the grass the breezes pass,
And stars look down at night.

IV.

Here Beauty, Love, and Joy,
With her in silence dwell,
As Eastern slaves are thrown in graves
Of kings remember'd well.

V.

But here let no man come,
My mourning rights to sever.
Who lieth here is cold and dumb.
Her dust is mine for ever !

A DIRGE.

I.

ART thou lonely in thy tomb?
Art thou cold in such a gloom?
Rouse thee, then, and make me room,—
Miserere Domine!

II.

Phantoms vex thy virgin sleep,
Nameless things around thee creep,
Yet be patient, do not weep,—
Miserere Domine!

III.

O be faithful! O be brave!
Naught shall harm thee in thy grave;
Let the restless spirits rave,—
Miserere Domine!

IV.

When my pilgrimage is done,
When the grace of God is won,
I will come to thee, my nun,—
Miserere Domine!

V.

Like a priest in flowing vest,
Like a pale, unbidden guest,
I will come to thee and rest,—
Miserere Domine!

DAISIES OUT AT SEA.

I.

THESE are the buds we bear beyond the surf—
 Enshrined in mould and turf—
 To take to fields far off, a land's salute
 Of high and vast repute—
 The Shakespeare-land of every heart's desire,
 Whereof, 'tis said, the fame shall not expire,
 But shine in all men's thoughts as shines a beacon-fire.

II.

O bright and gracious things that seem to glow
 With frills of winter snow,
 And little golden heads that know the sun,
 And seasons half begun,
 How blythe they look, how fresh and debonair,
 In this their prison on the seaward air,
 On which no lark has soar'd to improvise a prayer!

III.

Have they no memory of the inland grass—
 The fields where breezes pass,
 And where the full-eyed children, out at play,
 Make all the land so gay?
 Have they no thought of dews that, like a tear,
 Were shed by Morning on the Night's cold bier,
 In far-off English homes, belov'd by all men here?

IV.

O gems of earth ! O trinkets of the spring !
The sun, your gentle king,
Who counts your leaves and marshals ye apace,
In many a sacred place,
The godlike summer sun will miss ye all,
For he has foster'd all things, great and small,
Yea, all good things that live on earth's revolving ball.

V.

But when, on deck, he sees with eye serene
The kirtles, tender-green,
And fair fresh faces of his hardy flowers,
How will he throb for hours,
And wish the lark, the laureate of the light,
Were near at hand, to see so fair a sight,
And chant the joys thereof in words we cannot write.

VI.

Oh, I have lov'd ye more than may be told,
And deem'd it fairy-gold—
And fairy-silver—that ye bear withal ;
Ye are so soft and small,
I weep for joy to find ye here to-day
So near to Heaven, and yet so far away,
In our good ocean-ship, whose bows are wet with
spray.

VII.

Ye are the cynosure of many eyes
Bright-blue as English skies,—
The sailors' eyes that scan ye in a row,
As if intent to show

That this dear freight of mould and meadow-flower
Which sails the sea, in sunshine and in shower,
Is England's gift of love, which storms shall not devour.

VIII.

She sends ye forth in sadness and in joy,
As one may send a toy
To children's children, bred in other lands,
By love-abiding hands.
And, day by day, ye sail upon the foam
To call to mind the sires' and mothers' home,
Where babes, now grown to men, were wont of yore
to roam.

IX.

In England's name, in Shakespeare's—and in ours,
Who bear these trusted flowers—
There shall be heard a cheer from many throats,
A rush and roar of notes,
As loud, and proud, as those of heavenward birds;
And they who till the ground and tend the herds
Will read our thoughts therein, and clothe the same
in words.

X.

For England's sake, for England once again,
In pride, and power, and pain,
For England, aye! for England in the girth
Of all her joy and worth,
A strong and clear, outspoken, undefined
And uncontroll'd wild shout upon the wind
Will greet these winsome flowers as friends of human-kind!

THE KING'S REST.

I.

Here lies the King, within his tomb—a shrine for
men to cherish,
The landmark of a nation's love, whose fame shall
never perish—
Our Shakespeare's Rest!—the grave of him whom all
were proud to follow,
Because he joined to Plato's brain the frenzies of
Apollo.

II.

Aye, there he lies on English soil, the chief of all the
singers,
Highest and best in honour's quest among the pas-
sion-bringers.
And o'er the stone a warning-word, as if, in kingly
sorrow,
He had foreseen the vulgar touch of some demented
morrow.

III.

So many boons he left us here, so many golden
verses,
That, had he cursed us once a year, we might have
borne his curses.

But he was just. He cursed but once, as to the grave
he wended :—
“Accurst be he who moves my bones !” and there
the fury ended.

IV.

Oh ! he was great, and wise as Fate, and, by the pen
he wielded—
Yea, by the pen that was his sword—he loved the
cause he shielded.
He loved the children of the poor, the maiden and the
mother,
And all who toil by land and sea, and all who help
each other.

V.

He found that, as the years declined—as one by one
they vanished—
The earth was robbed of many joys, and Chivalry was
banished.
And so, to dower the world again—to fill the place
vacated,—
He thronged the air with ecstacies which he alone
created.

VI.

He built a palace out of naught, for Love to come and
win it,—
A dome of pride and pageantry, and only breath
within it.
But when he touched it with his hand, behold ! from
out the portal,
A thousand goodly shapes advanced,—and they were
all immortal.

VII.

These are the men we know to-day, the friends we
cannot sever,
Women and men of Shakespeare's pen who dwell
with us for ever.
We may forget the present hour, and facts around it
clinging.
But not the grand eternities of his emphatic singing.

VIII.

And when- he doffed his robe of clay, to prove amid
the dying
That death was meant for meaner men, and not for
his descrying,
At least he earned the common right which others,
still, have taken,
To turn his face to mother earth, belov'd, and not for-
saken.

IX.

He cannot die; but he has passed to Nature's holy
keeping,
Happy in sleep below the sod, and guarded in his
sleeping.
Oh! peace be his, by night and day,—his spirit with
the Giver,—
His dust within the Land he loved, beside the Avon
river!

HYMN TO THE RISING SUN.

I.

O mighty Orb that on the Morning's brow
Dost shine, all-seeing, in the plentitude
Of thine up-rising ! O thou joy of earth !
Look down and bless the day that's now ordained,
And let the pæans, let the pomp of spring
Be thine for ever, O thou Lordly One,
That hast the Orient for thy crowning-place
And all the welkin for thy way of grace.

II.

The sea is thine, the shores thereof are thine,
And all the haunts of men, all through the zones ;
Yea, each created thing through all the years,
All things are thine to make thee paramount ;
And there's no essence known, by sea or land,
That is not quickened by the sight of thee ;
No ! there is nothing, earthward or in air,
Which loves thee not with love beyond compare.

III.

O holiest on the mountains ! O thou sun
That art a portent and a prodigy,
And evermore dost measure time and space !
We turn to thee to see thee what thou art—

How fair, how constant, and how girt with beams,
And how exultant in thine azure tent,
When, one by one, the stars confess thy power
And leave thee all the landscape for a dower.

IV.

Bless thou the hills, the rivers and the plains,
The founts, the forests, and the foaming sea ;
And each and all thy suppliants on the earth !
All through the seasons of thy setting-time
Bless thou the winds which are thy messengers ;
And in thy rising bless thou every field,
And every harvest which thou shinest on
And every soul who claims thy benison.

V.

O planet-prince ! O glory born of night
That, out of night, dost come to sway the world !
Behold, we love thee as the Titans loved,
When thou did'st bear a god's name under Heaven.
For thou'rt the Regent of the King of Kings,
And his exponent through the centuries ;
And all thy ways are wondrous as of old
When Sappho praised thee with her harp of gold.

VI.

A laureate bird is thine in every grove ;
In all the fields thou hast thy troubadours.
A thousand times the lark has trilled to thee,
And waked the woods in April and in May ;

A myriad times and more his skyward notes
Have drenched the summer with the dews of song,
And made, as 'twere, a feast-time overhead
For bards to boast of when the days are dead.

VII.

Thou proud and pure ! Thou keeper of the keys
Of East and West, which are thy heritage,
Where thou—at soaring and at setting-time—
Dost hold a mansion, well-beloved of men,
Whereof the roofs are jasper and red light.
O jocund king ! transcendent, un-afraid,
And unassailed by storms throughout the land,
Look down and bless the oceans thou hast
spanned.

VIII.

Bless thou the workers and the men of thought,
The work they do, the wonders of the lute,
And all the whisperings of the woods and streams !
For thou'rt the wearer of the clouds of morn,
And where thou art the hours are golden-winged,
And where thy servants are thy fame is great,
And where thy singers are, in bower and town,
The hearts of men respond to thy renown.

IX.

Hear us, Light-Giver ! and, from dawn to dusk,
Be thou the fiery signal of much joy !
Unfurl thy banners beauteous on the hills,
And let the flash thereof—thy blazonry—

Be hope's fore-runner in the reddening meads.
O Sire of Seasons ! Monarch of the Months !
 Illume, uplift us, here upon the sod,
 And lead our Lives through Nature up to God.

LYRICS FROM "NERO AND ACTËA."*

THE SONG OF SELIUS.

I.

It is the kiss of Love that conquers death ;
And all the world is quickened by his breath ;
And day by day, and nightly, as of yore,
With smiles and tears and tricks from out his store,
The wanton god renews his rhapsodies.

II.

With raging breast the tiger to his mate
Leaps, fell and fierce, affamished and elate ;
But more than he for fierceness of attack
Is Woman's lover when, on wonder's track,
He lays her low in Love's enravishment. . . .

* A five-act tragedy.

THE SONG OF PETRONIUS.

I.

OH, tell me not that Love is lord of all,
Or that the moon is mistress of the spheres.
It is great Cæsar has the world in thrall ;
And what he sings in these eventful years
Is flecked with fire or sanctified by tears.

II.

It is the golden god who sways the heart,
And what he wills is law from land to land.
He has his portion in the poet's art ;
And grief and joy are merged at his command
To re-endow the raptures he has planned.

III.

He is the sovereign of the welkin's height,
And from the disk of his resplendent throne
He doth control the seasons in their flight ;
And all the stars are his from zone to zone,
And Dian's eyes are turned to him alone.

SONNETS.



I.

ECSTASY.

I CANNOT sing to thee as I would sing
If I were quickened like the holy lark,
With fire from Heaven and sunlight on his wing,
Who wakes the world with witcheries of the dark
Renewed in rapture in the reddening air.
A thing of splendour do I deem him then,
A feather'd frenzy with an angel's throat,
A something sweet that somewhere seems to float
'Twixt earth and sky, to be a sign to men.
He fills me with such wonder and despair!
I long to kiss thy locks, so golden bright,
As he doth kiss the tresses of the sun.
Oh! bid me sing to thee, my chosen one,
And do thou teach me, Love, to sing aright!

II.

VISIONS.

THE Poet meets Apollo on the hill,
And Pan and Flora and the Paphian Queen,
And infant naiads bathing in the rill,
And dryad maids that dance upon the green,
And fauns and Oreads in the silver sheen
They wear in summer, when the air is still.
He quaffs the wine of life, and quaffs his fill,
And sees Creation through its mask terrene.
The dead are wise, for they alone can see
As see the bards—as see, beyond the dust,
The eyes of babes. The dead alone are just.
There is no comfort in the bitter fee
That scholars pay for fame. True sage is he
Who doubts all doubt, and takes the soul on trust.

III.

THE DAISY.

SEE where it stands, the world-appointed flower,
Pure gold at centre, like the sun at noon—
A mimic sun to light a true-love bower
For fair Queen Mab, now dead or in a swoon,
Whom late a poet saw beneath the moon.
It lifts its dainty face till sunset hour,
As if endowed with nympholeptic power—
Then shuts its petals like a folding tune !
I love it more than words of mine can say,
And more than anchorite may breathe in prayer.
Methinks the lark has made it still his care
To brag of daisies to the lord of day.
Well ! I will follow suit, as best I may,
Launching my love-songs on the summer air.

IV.

PROBATION.

COULD I, O Love ! obtain a charter clear
To be thy bard, in all thy nights and days,
I would consult the stars, from year to year,
And talk with trees, and learn of them their ways,
And why the nymphs so seldom now appear
In human form, with rapt and earnest gaze ;
And I would learn of thee why Joy decays,
And why the Fauns have ceas'd to flourish here.
I would, in answer to the wind's "Alas !"
Explain the causes of a sorrow's flight ;
I would peruse the writing on the grass
Which flowers have traced in blue and red and
white ;
And, reading these, I would, as from a pen,
Read thoughts of thine unguess'd by other men !

v.

DANTE.

HE liv'd and lov'd ; he suffer'd ; he was poor ;
But he was gifted with the gifts of Heaven,
And those of all the week-days that are seven,
And those of all the centuries that endure.
He bow'd to none ; he kept his honour sure.
He follow'd in the wake of those Eleven
Who walk'd with Christ, and lifted up his steven*
To keep the bulwarks of his faith secure.
He knew the secrets of the singing-time ;
He track'd the sun ; he ate the luscious fruit
Of grief and joy ; and with his wonder-lute
He made himself a name in every clime.
The minds of men were madly stricken mute,
And all the world lay subject to his rhyme !

* Steven, a voice ; old word revived.

VI.

DIFFIDENCE.

I CANNOT deck my thought in proud attire,
Or make it fit for thee in any dress,
Or sing to thee the songs of thy desire,
In summer's heat, or by the winter's fire,
Or give thee cause to comfort or to bless.
For I have scann'd mine own unworthiness,
And well I know the weakness of the lyre
Which I have striven to sway to thy caress.
Yet I must quell my tears and calm the smart
Of my vext soul, and steadfastly emerge
From lonesome thoughts, as from the tempest's
surge.
I must control the beating of my heart,
And bid false pride be gone, who, with his art,
Has press'd, too long, a suit I dare not urge.

VII.

FAIRIES.

GLORY endures when calumny hath fled ;
And fairies show themselves, in friendly guise,
To all who hold a trust beyond the dead,
And all who pray, albeit so worldly-wise,
With cheerful hearts, or wildly-weeping eyes.
They come and go when children are in bed
To gladden them with dreams from out the skies
And sanctify all tears that they have shed !
Fairies are wing'd for wandering to and fro.
They live in legends ; they survive the Greeks.
Wisdom is theirs ; they live for us and grow,
Like things ambrosial, fairer than the freaks
Of signs and seasons which the poets know,
Or fires of sunset on the mountain peaks.

VIII.

SPIRIT LOVE.

How great my joy ! How grand my recompense !
I bow to thee ; I keep thee in my sight,
I call thee mine, in love though not in sense,
I share with thee the heritage immense
Of holy dreams which come to us at night,
When, through the medium of the spirit-lens,
We see the soul in its primeval light,
And Reason spares the hopes it cannot blight.
It is the soul of thee, and not the form,
And not the face I yearn to in my sleep.
It is thyself. The body is the storm,
The soul the star beyond it in the deep
Of Nature's calm. And yonder on the steep
The Sun of Faith, quiescent, round, and warm !

IX.

AFTER TWO DAYS.

ANOTHER night has turn'd itself to day,
Another day has melted into eve,
And lo ! again I tread the measured way
Of word and thought, the twain to interweave,
As flowers absorb the rays that they receive.
And, all along the woodland where I stray,
I think of thee, and Nature keeps me gay,
And sorrow soothes the soul it would bereave.
Nor will I fear that thou, so far apart,
So dear to me, so fair, and so benign,
Wilt un-desire the fealty of a heart
Which evermore is pledg'd to thee and thine,
And turns to thee, in regions where thou art,
To hymn the praises of thy face divine !

X.

BYRON.

HE was a god descended from the skies
To fight the fight of Freedom o'er a grave,
And consecrate a hope he could not save ;
For he was weak withal, and foolish-wise.
Dark were his thoughts, and strange his destinies,
And oftentimes his life he did deprave.
But all do pity him, though none despise.
He was a prince of song, though sorrow's slave.
He ask'd for tears—and they were tinged with fire ;
He ask'd for love, and love was sold to him.
He look'd for solace at the goblet's brim,
And found it not ; then wept upon his lyre.
He sang the songs of all the world's desire—
He wears the wreath no rivalry can dim !

XI.

LOVE'S AMBITION.

I MUST invoke thee for my spirit's good,
And prove myself un-guilty of the crime
Of mere self-seeking, though with this imbued.
I sing as sings the mavis in a wood,
Content to be alive at harvest-time.
Had I its wings I should not be withstood !
But I will weave my fancies into rhyme,
And greet afar the heights I cannot climb.
I will invoke thee, Love ! though far away,
And pay thee homage, as becomes a knight
Who longs to keep his true-love in his sight.
Yea, I will soar to thee, in roundelay,
In shine and shower, and make a bold assay
Of each fond hope, to compass thee aright.

XII.

LOVE'S DEFEAT.

Do what I will I cannot chant so well
As other men ; and yet my soul is true.
My hopes are bold ; my thoughts are hard to tell,
But thou can'st read them, and accept them, too,
Though, half-abash'd, they seem to hide from view.
I strike the lyre, I sound the hollow shell ;
And why ? For comfort, when my thoughts rebel,
And when I count the woes that must ensue.
But for this reason, and no other one,
I dare to look thy way, and bow my head
To thy sweet name, as sunflower to the sun,
Though, peradventure, not so wisely fed
With garden fancies. Tears must now be shed,
Unnumber'd tears, till life or love be done !

XIII.

A THUNDERSTORM AT NIGHT.

THE lightning is the shorthand of the storm
That tells of chaos ; and I read the same
As one may read the writing of a name—
As one in Hell may see the sudden form
Of God's fore-finger pointed as in blame.
How weird the scene ! The Dark is sulphur-warm
With hints of death ; and in their vault enorme
The reeling stars coagulate in flame.
And now the torrents from their mountain-beds
Roar down uncheck'd ; and serpents shaped of mist
Writhe up to Heaven with unforbidden heads ;
And thunder-clouds, whose lightnings intertwist,
Rack all the sky, and tear it into shreds,
And shake the air like Titans that have kiss'd !

XIV.

IN TUSCANY.

Dost thou remember, friend of vanish'd days,
How, in the golden land of love and song,
We met in April in the crowded ways
Of that fair city where the soul is strong,
Aye ! strong as fate, for good or evil praise ?
And how the lord whom all the world obeys—
The lord of light to whom the stars belong—
Illumed the track that led thee through the throng ?
Dost thou remember, in the wooded dale,
Beyond the town of Dante the Divine,
How all the air was flooded as with wine ?
And how the lark, to drown the nightingale,
Peal'd out sweet notes ? I live to tell the tale.
But thou ? Oblivion signs thee with a sign !

XV.

A HERO.

THE warrior knows how fitful is the fight—
How sad to live—how sweet perchance to die.
Is Fame his joy? He meets her on the height,
And when he falls he shouts his battle-cry;
His eyes are wet; our own will not be dry.
Nor shall we stint his praise, or our delight,
When he survives to serve his Land aright
And make his fame the watchword of the sky.
In all our hopes his love is with us still;
He tends our faith, he soothes us when we grieve.
His acts are just; his word we must believe,
And none shall spurn him, though his blood they spill
To pierce the heart whose pride they cannot kill:—
Death dies for him whose fame is his reprieve!

XVI.

REMORSE.

Go, get thee gone. I love thee not, I swear ;
And if I lov'd thee well in days gone by,
And if I kiss'd, and trifled with thy hair,
And crown'd my love, to prove the same a lie,
My doom is this : my joy was quick to die.
The chain of custom, in the drowsy lair
Of some slain vision, is a weight to bear,
And both abhorr'd it—thou as well as I.
Ah, God ! 'tis tearful-true ; and I repent ;
And like a dead, live man I live for this :—
To stand, unvalued, on a dream's abyss,
And be mine own most piteous monument.
What ! did I rob thee, Lady, of a kiss ?
There, take it back ; and frown ; and be content !

XVII.

THE MISSION OF THE BARD.

HE is a seer. He wears the wedding-ring
Of Art and Nature ; and his voice is bold.
He should be quicker than the birds to sing,
And fill'd with frenzy like the men of old
Who sang their songs for country and for king,
Nothing should daunt him, though the news were
told
By fiends from Hell ! He should be swift to hold
And swift to part with truth, as from a spring.
He should discourse of war and war's alarm,
And deeds of peace, and garlands to be sought,
And love, and lore, and death, and beauty's charm,
And warlike men subdued by tender thought,
And grief dismiss'd, and hatred set at nought,
And Freedom shielded by his strong right arm !

XVIII.

DEATH.

It is the joy, it is the zest of life,
To know that Death, ungainly to the vile,
Is not a traitor with a reckless knife,
And not a serpent with a look of guile,
But one who greets us with a seraph's smile—
An angel-guest to tend us after strife,
And keep us true to God when fears are rife,
And sceptic thought would daunt us or defile.
He walks the world as one empower'd to fill
The fields of space for Father and for Son.
He is our friend, though morbidly we shun
His tender touch— a cure for every ill.
He is the king of peace, when all is done.
Earth and the air are moulded to his will.

XIX.

TO ONE I LOVE.

OH, let me plead with thee to have a nook,
A garden nook, not far from thy domain,
That there, with harp, and voice and poet-book,
I may be true to thee, and, passion-fain,
Rehearse the songs of nature once again : —
The songs of Cynthia wandering by the brook
To sooth the raptures of a lover's pain,
And those of Phyllis with her shepherd's crook !
I die to serve thee, and for this alone—
To be thy bard-elect, from day to day—
I would forego the right to fill a throne.
I would consent to be the famine-prey
Of some fierce pard, if ere the night were flown
I could subdue thy spirit to my sway.

XX.

EX TENEBRA.

THE winds have showr'd their rains upon the sod,
And flowers and trees have murmur'd as with lips.
The very silence has appeal'd to God
In man's behalf, though smitten by His rod.
'Twould seem as if the blight of some eclipse
Had dull'd the skies—as if, on mountain-tips,
The winds of Heaven had spurn'd the life terrene,
And clouds were foundering like benighted ships.
But what is this, exultant, unforeseen,
Which cleaves the dark? A fearful, burning thing!
Is it the moon? Or Saturn's scarlet ring
Hurl'd into space? It is the tempest-sun!
It is the advent of the Phœban king
Which tells the valleys that the storm is done!

XXI.

VICTOR HUGO.

VICTOR the King ! alive to-day, not dead !
Behold, I bring thee with a subject's hand
A poor pale wreath, the best at my command,
But all unfit to deck so grand a head.
It is the outcome of a neighbour land
Denounced of thee, and spurn'd for many years.
It is the token of a nation's tears
Which oft has joy'd in thee, and shall again.
Love for thy hate, applause for thy disdain—
These are the flowers we spread upon thy hearse.
We give thee back, to-day, thy poet-curse ;
We call thee friend ; we ratify thy reign,
Kings change their sceptres for a funeral stone,
But thou hast turn'd thy tomb into a throne !

XXII.

CYNTHIA.

O LADY Moon, elect of all the spheres
To be the guardian of the ocean-tides,
I charge thee, say, by all thy hopes and fears,
And by thy face, the oracle of brides,
Why evermore Remorse with thee abides?
Is life a bane to thee, and fraught with tears,
That thus forlorn and sad thou dost confer
With ghosts and shades? Perchance thou dost aspire
To bridal honours, and thy Phœbus-sire
Forbids the banns, whoe'er thy suitor be?
Is this thy grievance, O thou chief of nuns?
Or dost thou weep to know that Jupiter
Hath many moons—his daughters and his sons—
And Earth, thy mother, only one in thee?

XXIII.

PHILOMEL.

Lo, as a minstrel at the court of Love,
The nightingale, who knows his mate is nigh,
Thrills into rapture ; and the stars above
Look down, affrighted, as they would reply.
There is contagion, and I know not why,
In all this clamour, all this fierce delight,
As if the sunset, when the day did swoon,
Had drawn some wild confession from the moon.
Have wrongs been done ? Have crimes enacted been
To shame the weird retirement of the night ?
O clamorous bird ! O sad, sweet nightingale !
Withhold thy voice, and blame not beauty's queen.
She may be pure, though dumb : and she is pale,
And wears a radiance on her brow serene.

XXIV.

THE SONNET KING.

O PETRARCH ! I am here. I bow to thee,
Great king of sonnets, thronèd long ago,
And lover-like, as Love enjoineeth me,
And miser-like, enamoured of my woe,
I reckon up my teardrops as they flow.
I would not lose the power to shed a tear
For all the wealth of Plutus and his reign.
I would not be so base as not complain
When she I love is absent from my sight,
No, not for all the marvels of the night,
And all the varying splendours of the year.
Do thou assist me, thou ! that art the light
Of all true lovers' souls, in all the sphere,
To make a May-time of my sorrows slain.

XXV.

TOKEN FLOWERS.

OH, not the daisy, for the love of God !
Take not the daisy ; let it bloom apace
Untouch'd alike by splendour or disgrace
Of party feud. Its stem is not a rod ;
And no one fears, or hates it, on the sod.
It laughs, exultant, in the Morning's face,
And everywhere doth fill a lowly place,
Though fraught with favours for the darkest clod.
'Tis said the primose is a party flower,
And means coercion, and the coy renown
Of one who toil'd for country and for crown.
This may be so ! But, in my Lady's bower,
It means content—a hope—a golden hour.
Primroses smile ; and daisies cannot frown !

XXVI.

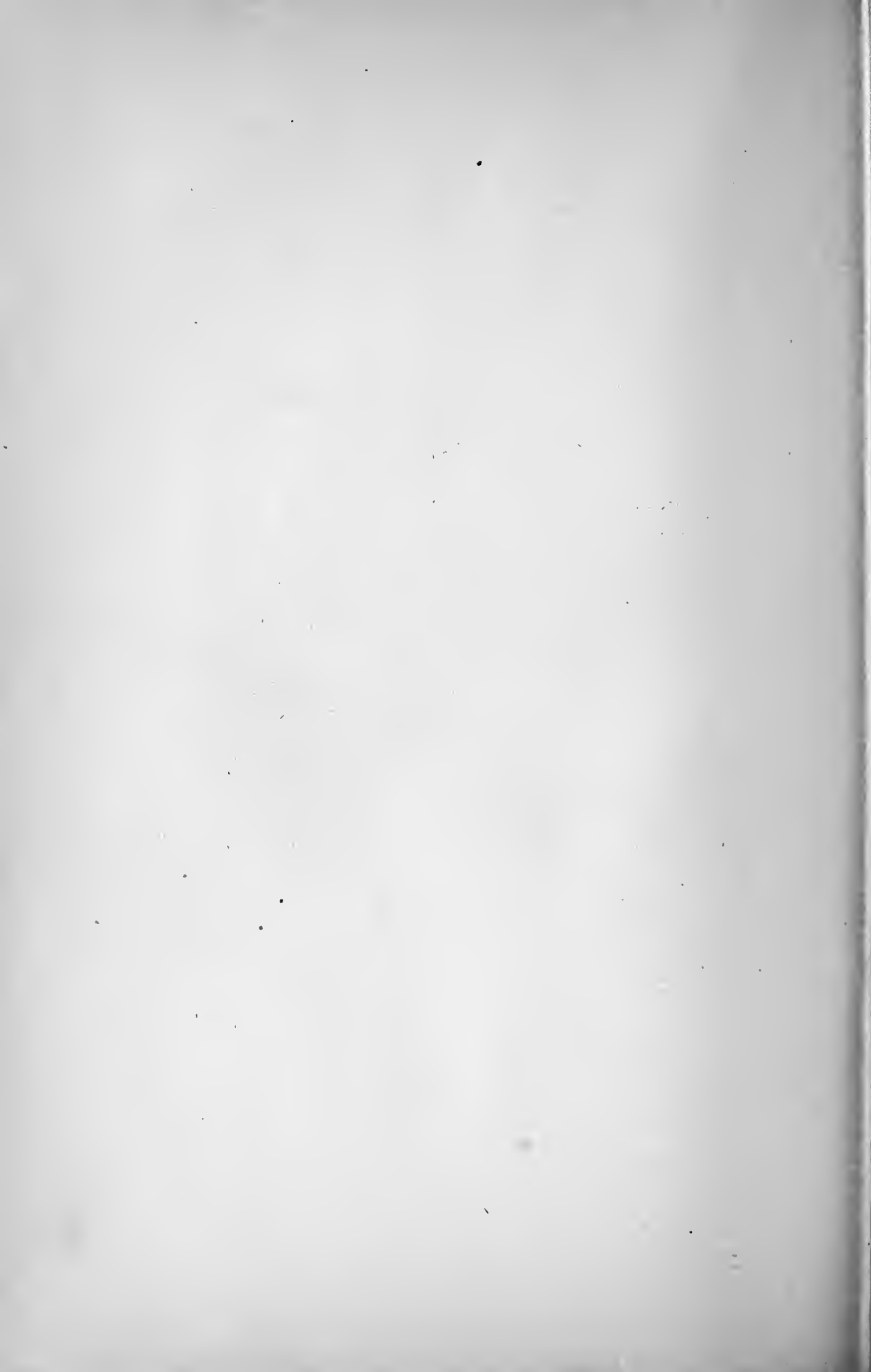
A PRAYER FOR ENGLAND.

AH, fair Lord God of Heaven, to whom we call—
By whom we live—on whom our hopes are built—
Do Thou, from year to year, e'en as Thou wilt,
Control the Realm, but suffer not to fall
Its ancient faith, its grandeur, and its thrall !
Do thou preserve it, in the hours of guilt,
When foemen thirst for blood that should be spilt,
And keep it strong when traitors would appal.
Uphold us still, O God ! and be the screen
And sword and buckler of our England's might,
That foemen's wiles, and woes which intervene,
May fade away, as fades a winter's night.
Thine ears have heard us, and Thine eyes have seen.
Wilt Thou not help us, Lord ! to find the Light ?

XXVII.

A VETERAN POET.

I KNEW thee first as one may know the fame
Of some apostle, as a man may know
The mid-day sun far-shining o'er the snow.
I hail'd thee prince of poets ! I became
Vassal of thine, and warm'd me at the flame
Of thy pure thought, my spirit all aglow
With dreams of peace, and pomp, and lyric show,
And all the splendours, Master ! of thy name.
But now, a man reveal'd, a guide for men,
I see thy face, I clasp thee by the hand ;
And, though the Muses in thy presence stand,
There's room for me to loiter in thy ken.
O lordly soul ! O wizard of the pen !
What news from God ? What word from Fairyland ?



ITALIAN POEMS.

By ERIC MACKAY.



LA ZINGARELLA.

I.

DIMMI, dimmi, o trovatore,
Tu che canti sul liuto,
Bello e bruno e pien d' amore
Dalla valle in su venuto,
Non ti fermi sull' altura
Per mostrar la tua bravura?
Non mi canti sul burrone
Qualche lieta tua canzone?

II.

—Zingarella, in sulla sera
Canta bene il rosignolo,
Piange e canta in sua preghiera
Salutando un dolce suolo.
Ma il liuto al mio toccare
Pianger sà, non sà pregare . . .
Deh ! che vuoi col tuo sorriso,
Tu che sai di paradiso ?

III.

—Vò sentire in tuo linguaggio
Come è fatto un uom fedele,
Se l' amor lo fa selvaggio,
Se il destin lo fa crudele.

Parla schietto ; son profana
 Ma ben leggo l' alma umana.
 Parla pur dei tuoi viaggi
 Nei deserti e nei villaggi.

IV.

—Canterotti, o zingarella,
 Qualche allegra mia ballata,
 Qualche estatica novella
 D' una dama innamorata . . .
 —Dimmi tutto !—Canterotti
 D' Ungheria le meste notti.
 —D' Ungheria?—Del Bosco Santo
 Dove nacque il gran Sorranto.

V.

Sappi in breve, son marchese
 Castellano e cantatore,
 Cattivai con questo arnese
 D' una maga un dì l' amore.
 —D' una maga?—Si, di quelle
 Che san legger nelle stelle.
 —E fu bella?—Non v' è guari
 Dama, oh no, che le sia pari.

VI.

Come parca in fra le dita
 Essa tenne il mio destino,
 Fu la sfinge di mia vita
 Col sorriso suo divino.
 Avea biondi i suoi capelli,
 Occhi neri e molto belli,
 Braccia e collo in puritate
 Come neve quando cade.

VII.

—Taci, taci, o castellano ;
Qui convien pregar per essa.
—Io l' amai d' amor sovrano !
Pronta fu la sua promessa.
L' aspettai ; mi fu cortese,
Ma fuggì dal mio paëse,
Travestita un dì di Maggio
Come biondo e giovin paggio.

VIII.

Oh, giammai non fu sognata
Cosa uguale per bellezza ;
Chi la vide incoronata
Sorrìdea per tenerezza.
Chi la vide di mattina
La credeva una regina,
Qualche sogno di poeta,
Qualche incanto di profeta !

IX.

—Traditor ! col tuo liuto
Tu l' hai fatto innamorare !
—Io giurai per San Bernuto,
E pel Cristo in sull' altare,
Per Giuseppe e per Maria,
Che farei la vita pia.
—E il facesti?—I sacri voti
Ricantai dei sacerdoti !

X.

—Or m' ascolta, o trovatore,
Or rispondi, e dimmi il vero :

Hai veduto il mesto fiore
 Che si coglie in cimitero?
 Hai veduto i fior di rose
 Che s' intreccian per le spose,
 Quando cantan desolati
 Gli usignoli abbandonati?

XI.

Crolli il capo ; impallidisci ;
 Stendi a me la bianca mano ;
 Non rispondi ; e forse ambisci
 Della sposa ormai l' arcano ?
 Qui morì la Gilda, maga
 Sotto il nome di Menzaga ;
 Qui morì, nel suo pallore,
 Per l' amor d' un trovatore !

.

XII.

Stravolto l' amante s' inchina ;
 Ei mira la mesta donzella.
 Velata è la maga, ma bella,
 Coll'occhio che pianger non sà.
 —O donna, l' amor t' indovina . . .
 Tu, Gilda, t' ascondi colà !

XIII.

Nel mondo non v' è la sembianza
 Di tale e di tanta beltade !
 Non cresce per queste contrade
 Nè giglio nè spiro d' amor.
 Tu sola tu sei la Speranza
 Che tenni qua stretta sul cor.

XIV.

Tu sola tu sei la mia dama,
 La gioja e l' onor della vita;
 Tu sola, donzella romita,
 Del mondo la diva sei tu.
 L' amor ti conosce, e la fama;
 Nè manca l' antica virtù.

XV.

Ma dove è la fè del passato
 Che tanto brillò nella festa?
 L' amore, l' onore, le gesta
 D' un tempo che presto fuggì?
 Fu vero? L' ho forse sognato?
 Tu pur l' hai sognato così!

.

XVI.

La maga intenta ascolta il suo galante;
 Ride, si scioglie il velo e guarda il Sire.
 Rossa diventa e bianca in uno istantè,
 E poi s' asconde il viso e vuol fuggire.
 Corre nei bracci suoi lo fido amante;
 E favellar vorria nel suo gioire . . .

XVII.

—Deh! taci, oh taci! Al mondo ovunque è doglia.
 Gilda son io. Ti bacio e son contenta.
 Pianger non so se non per pazza voglia
 Come la strega allor che si lamenta . . .

XVIII.

Cosa vuoi tu? Che vuoi che sì mi guardi?

Diva non son, ma donna; e fui crudele.

—Baciami in bocca. O Dio! mi stringi ed ardi
Tanto d' amore e piangi e sei fedele?

XIX.

—Ugo! M' ascolta, io son la tua meschina,

Forte ben sì, ma doma in questi agoni;

Sono la schiava tua, la tua regina,

Quel che tu vuoi purchè non m' abbandoni!

XX.

—O cara, o casta, o bella, o tu che bramo,

Dammi la morte unita a un tuo sorriso.

Eva sarai per me. Son io l' Adamo;

E quivi in terra avrassi il paradiso!

IL PONTE D' AVIGLIO.

I.

O MESTO bambino col capo chinato,
Rispondi ; rispondi ! Che fece Renato ?
Fu vinto Morello ? Fu salvo Lindoro ?
Rispondi ; rispondi !—Son padre di loro.

II.

Non veggio tornare dal Ponte d' Aviglio
Renato superbo del vinto periglio.
L' han forse promosso ? Risorge la guerra ?
Rispondi ; rispondi !—L' han messo sottera.

III.

O ciel ! tu lo senti, tu vedi l' oltraggio ;
Renato fu prence del nostro villaggio ! . . .
Ma dimmi, piccino. Che fece Morello ?
Rispondi ; rispondi !—Lo chiude l' avello.

IV.

Ahi, crudo destino ! Si grande, si forte,
Morello nasceva per vincer la morte.
Ma l' altro ? Che fece sul campo serrato ?
Rispondi ; rispondi !—Mori da soldato.

V.

Gran Dio ! che mi narri ! Pur desso m' è tolto ?
Renato m' è morto ? Morello sepolto ?
E piangi, . . . tu pure ? Gentile bambino !
Che dici ? Rispondi !—Vi resta Giannino.

VI.

Oh si, del figliuolo l' ignoto tesoro,
L' incognito figlio del biondo Lindoro.
Ma dove trovarlo nel nome di Dio ?
Rispondi ; rispondi !—Buon padre, son io !

I MIEI SALUTI.

I.

Ti saluto, Margherita,
Fior di vita, . . . ti saluto !
Sei la speme del mattino,
Sei la gioja del giardino.

II.

Ti saluto, Rosignolo
Nel tuo duolo, . . . ti saluto !
Sei l' amante della rosa
Che morendo si fa sposa.

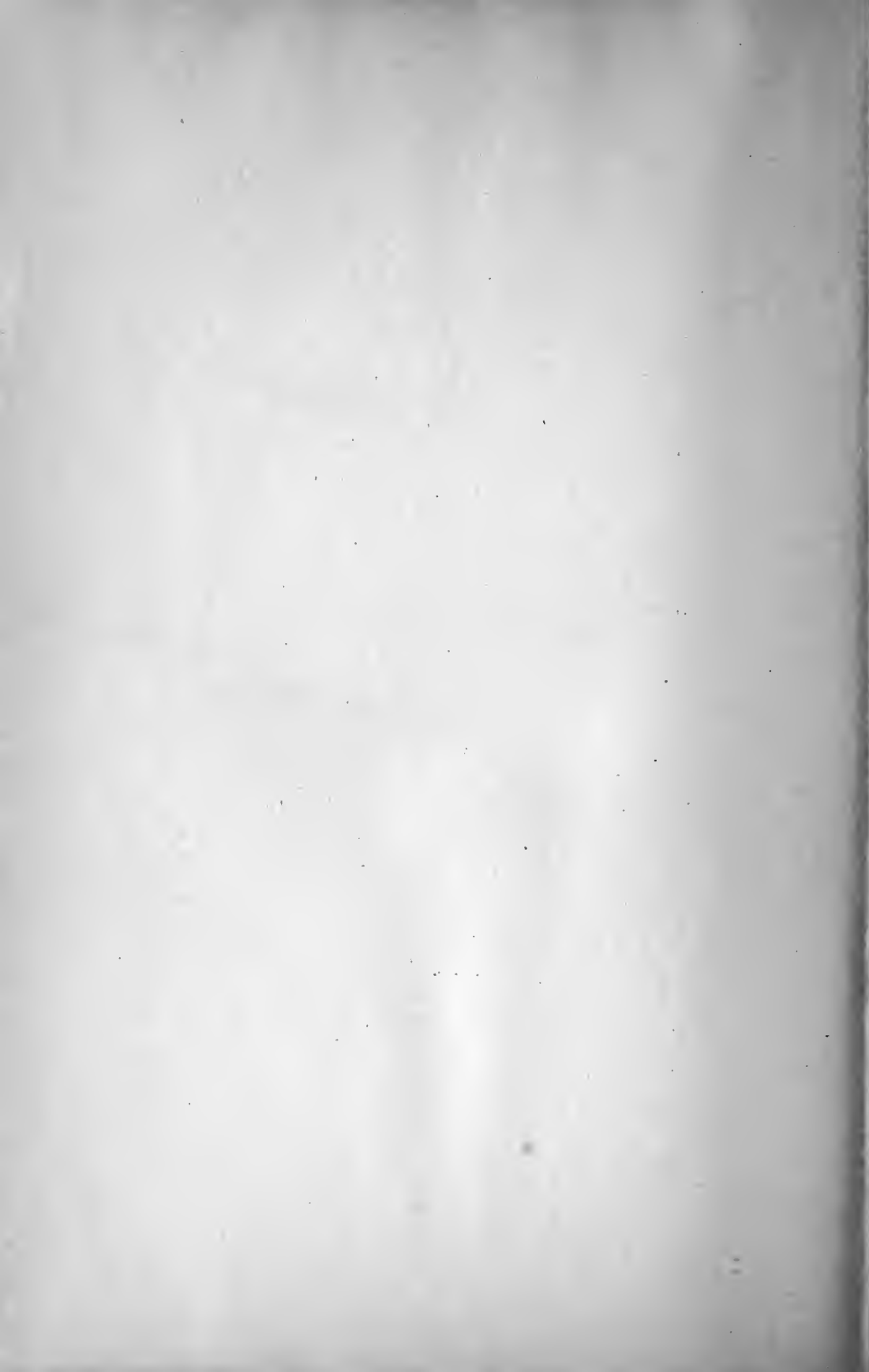
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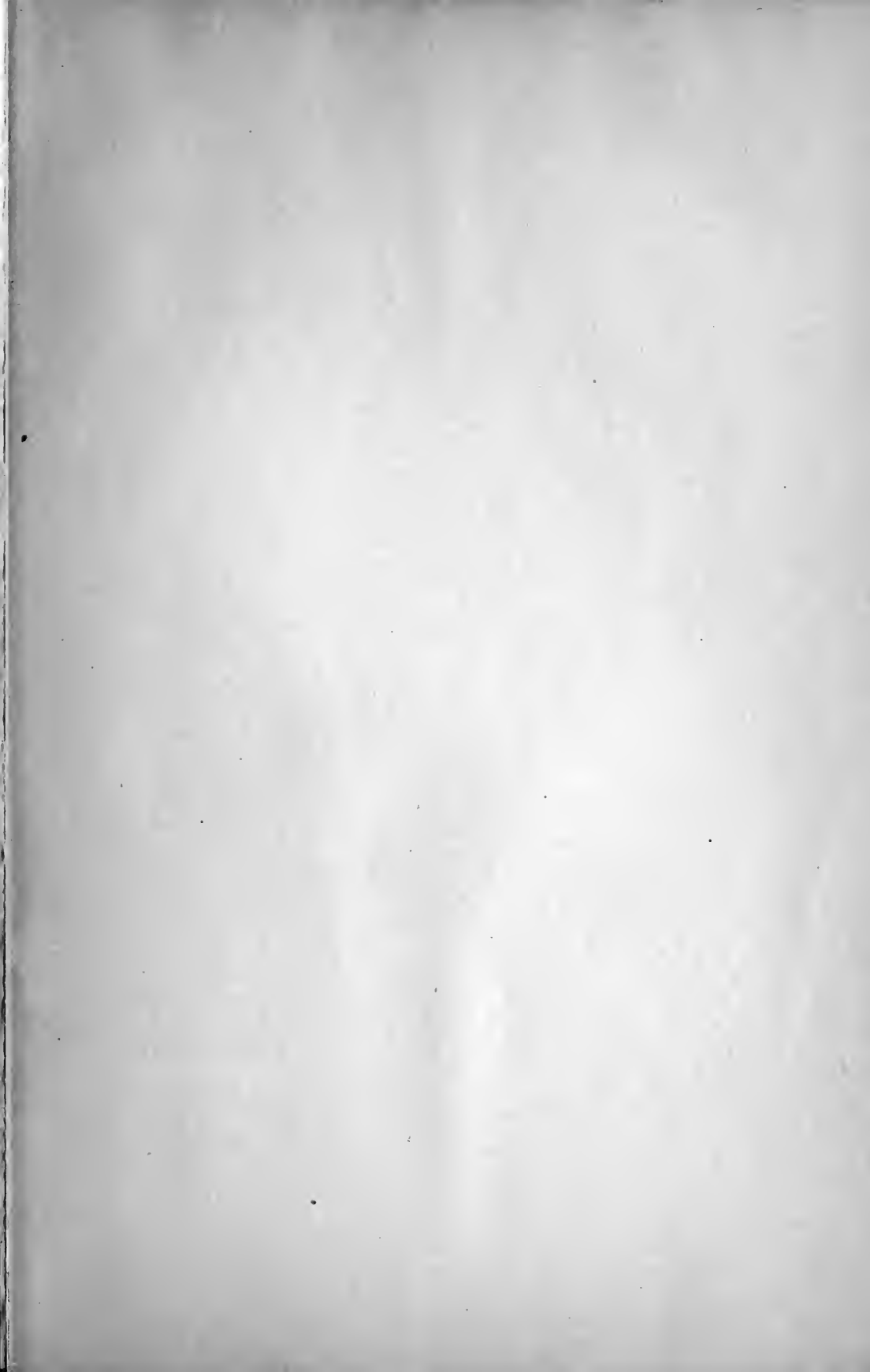
Ti saluto, Sol di Maggio
Col tuo raggio, . . . ti saluto !
Sei l' Apollo del passato,
Sei l' amore incoronato.

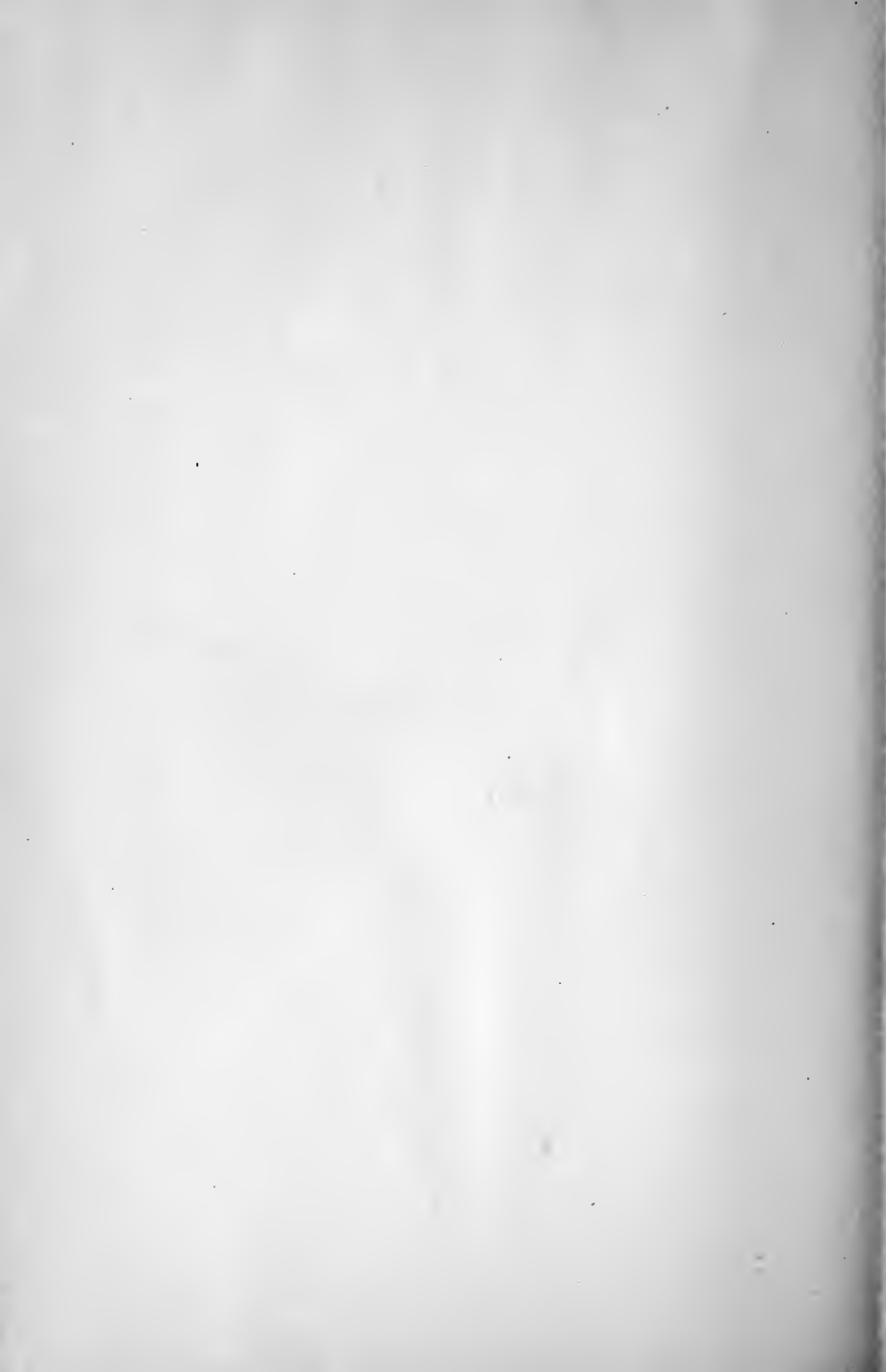
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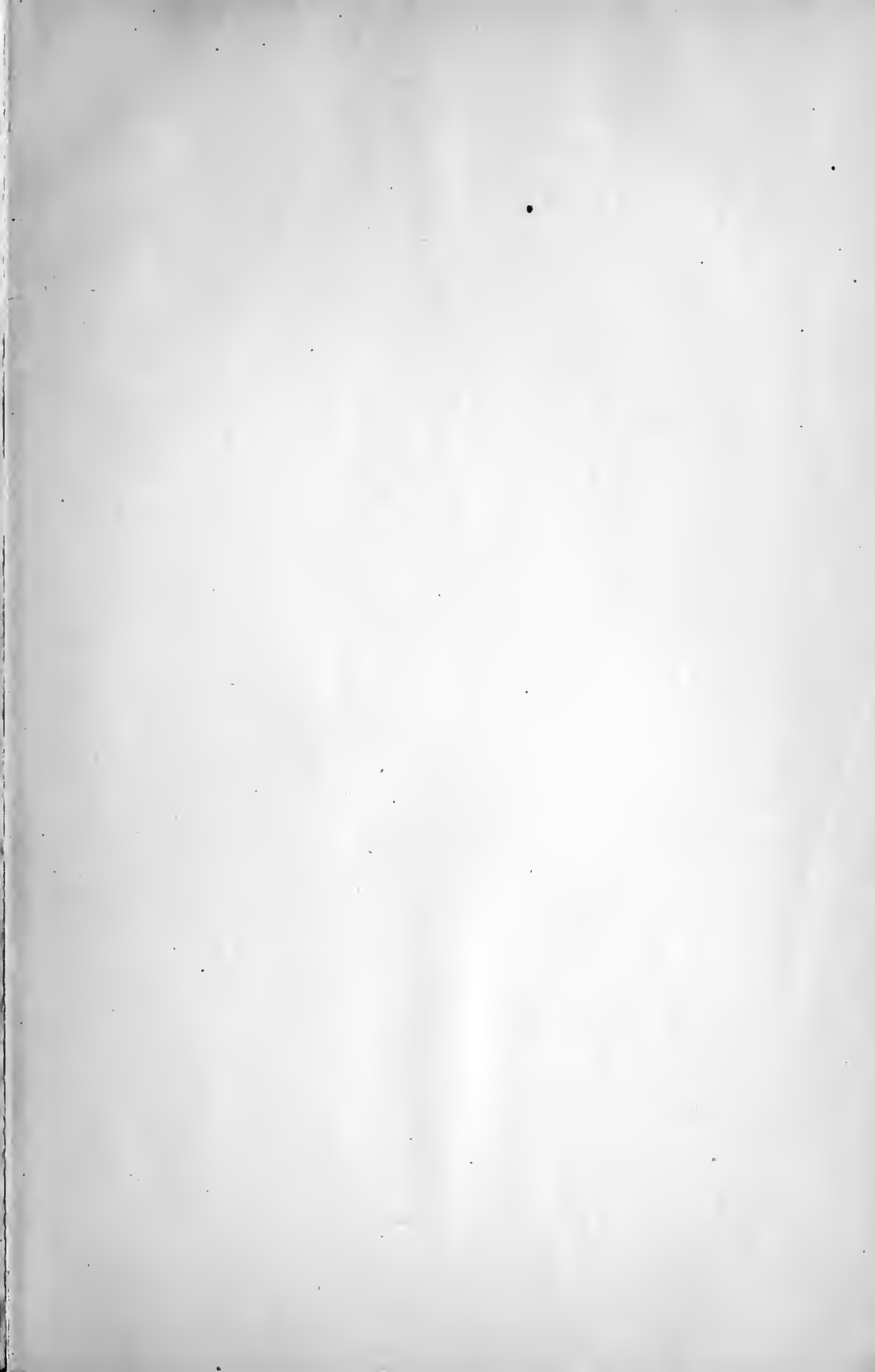
Ti saluto, Donna mia,
Casta e pia, . . . ti saluto !
Sei la diva dei desiri,
Sei la Santa dei Sospiri.

THE END.

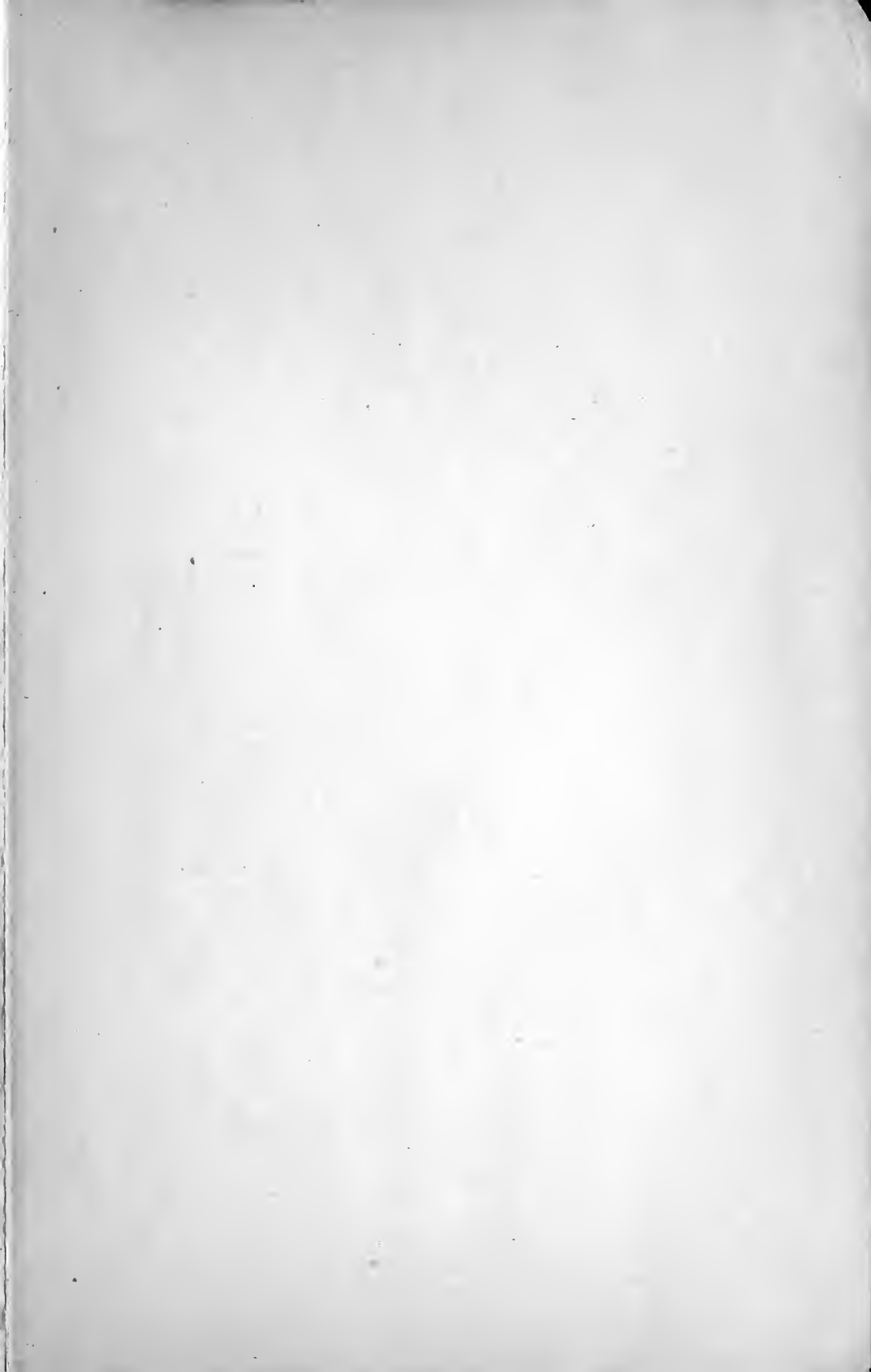






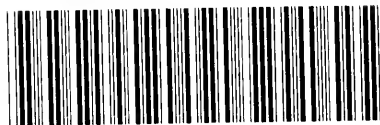








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